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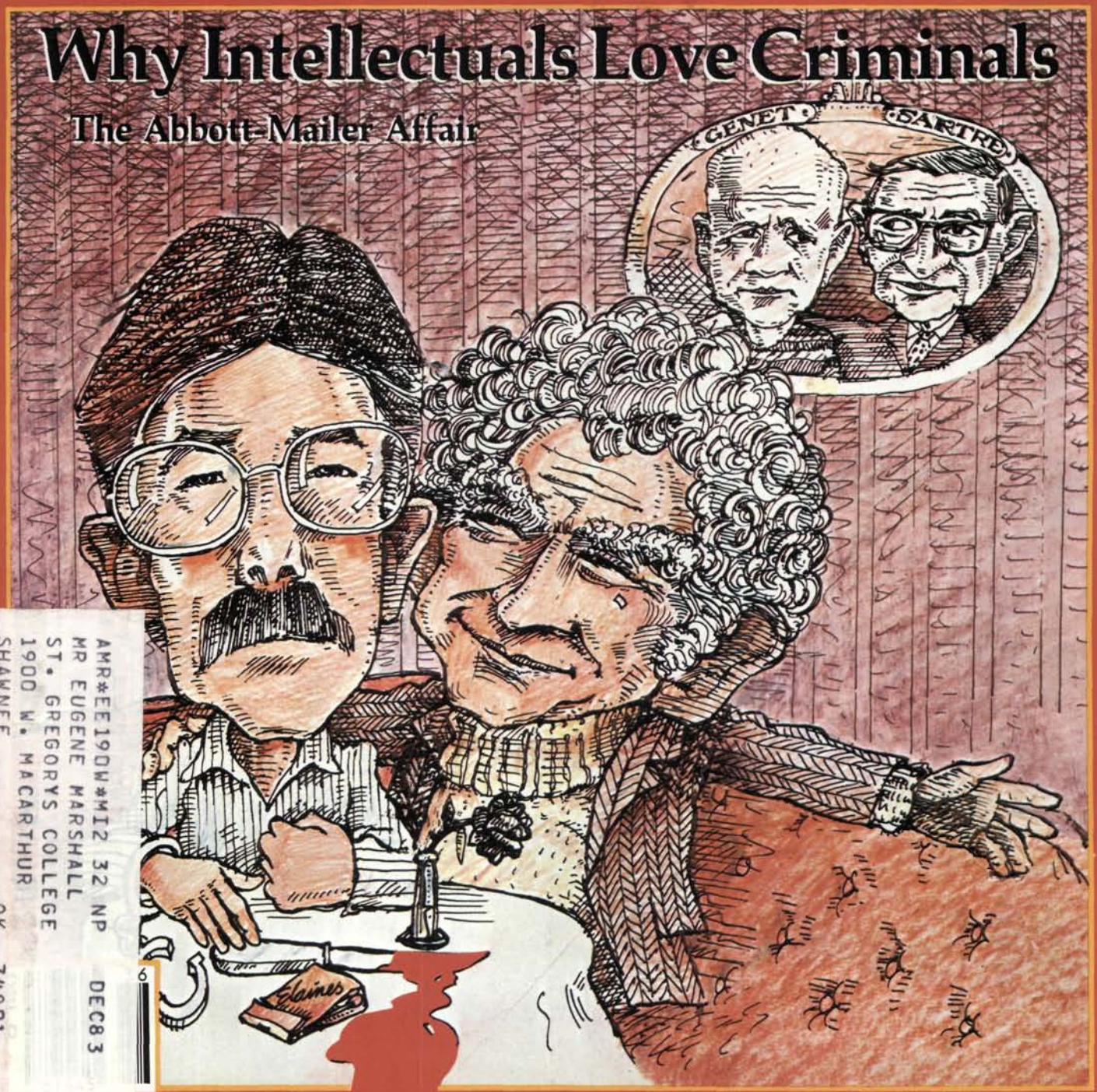

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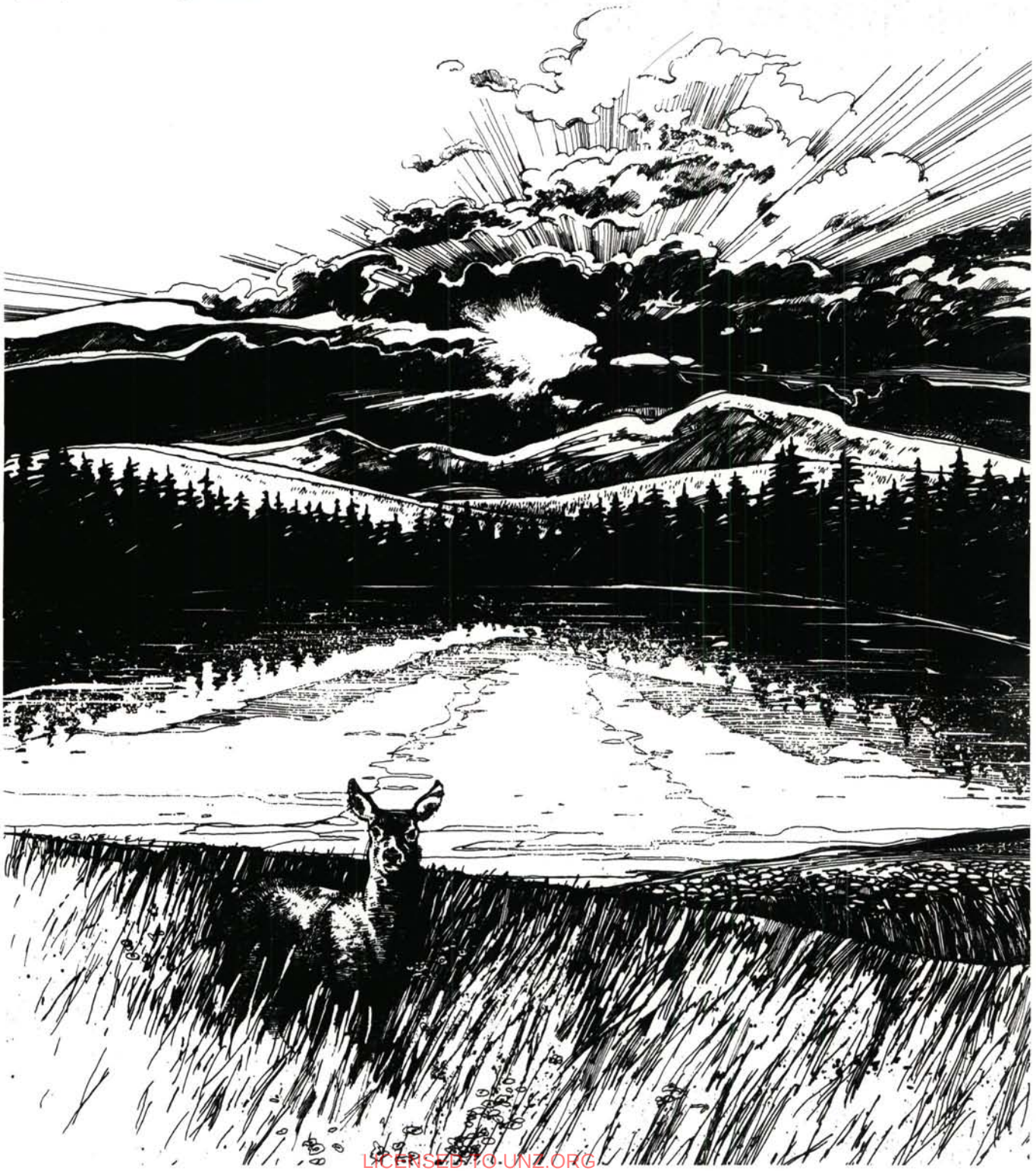

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Back From The Ranch

We get this capital running again in September. The president returns September 3. Congress gets back September 9. Some of the rest of us have returned already. (It's been a bad blueberry crop year up in Ulster County.) Now Chapter II of the singular Reagan administration starts. Can he keep control? He has big problems on the domestic and international fronts. He left in a characteristically casual manner for a long month's vacation in California, and he slept through the Libyan dogfight and wasn't notified till six hours later. People were reminded of Coolidge's quaint afternoon naps. But in this case, Reagan had carefully set up the confrontation; the outline of it, as a "challenge" to Qaddafi, was spelled out in *Newsweek*'s Periscope column in advance. He delegated the affair to the Navy, as he delegates many things, and it performed with slick efficiency. So now we begin again.

Before leaving California Reagan made another decision: he will ask Congress to sell the controversial $8 billion package of arms aircraft to Saudi Arabia. Menachem Begin, a grim foe of the transfer, is due here September 6 through September 9 and on September 9 the White House starts the notification process on the sale to Congress. Previous polls in the Senate and House indicate that majorities oppose the transfer of the computer-crammed airborne warning and control system aircraft (Awacs) to the Saudis because of Israeli objections. The planes are flying radar stations that can detect hostile aircraft 250 miles away. Begin announced "unreserved opposition"; the planes might strip Israel bare of its military secrets. But to block the sale requires a "no" vote in each house—something that Congress has never done. Reagan calls it the "cornerstone" of his Middle East defense program.

When the president left for California he dominated Congress: his victory in the tax-budget battle changed the ever-fluctuating executive-legislative relationship; it caused many to revise their opinion of this conservative exactor. Now we are going to find out a lot more about him, abroad and at home, in a short time.

Abroad there's Russia, and at home there's the economy. Reagan was elected on a platform demanding a tough line to Moscow and there's no question of his sincerity. He has tossed off the biggest arms buildup in peacetime history (though whether he can go through with it given the new threat of deficits and inflation remains to be seen). He has unilaterally decided to assemble neutron bombs without advance consultation with friendly governments. There's a big growth of pacifism in the allied countries in Europe. As in the past, the Europeans are bewildered by the division of authority in the United States. SALT II, for example, was in negotiation for seven years under three presidents, was signed, and was then suspended before ratification. Again, the side adventure of El Salvador hardly seems to have inspired confidence. The world shivers at the nuclear threat and wants some assurance that the United States, besides being firm, is reasonable.

Secretary Haig meets Andrei Gromyko next week, the first ministerial-level meeting of US and Soviet leaders in the Reagan administration. That meeting should tell us a lot. Haig has made a couple of speeches on the subject and I am pleased to discover a moderate and restrained approach—in words anyway—that belies an earlier impression of the belligerency. He did not shout at the Russians in his address to the American Bar Association on August 11. He calmly reviewed the differences between the superpowers, did not forecast any immediate breakthrough ("the strong element of competition in our relationship is destined to remain"), but did promise to try to create conditions of restraint and reciprocity. "The Soviets will eventually respond," he said hopefully, "to a policy that clearly demonstrates both our determination to restrain their continued self-aggrandizement and our willingness to reciprocate their self-restraint."

Those are only words, of course, but they do set a mood. Haig followed this on ABC's "Issues and Answers" on August 23 with another moderate comment: "we are prepared to meet the Soviet leadership halfway." He anticipated "some rather stiff exchanges" but hoped these might lead to additional ministerial discussions and ultimately "to a summit-level meeting between our president and President Brezhnev." This is a wonderful change from some of the Reagan views of communism as an apocalyptic menace. Secretary of Defense Weinberger complains that we have allowed our "strategic superiority to be eroded." Most of us had hoped that equality rather than "superiority" would be adequate. A search for the latter would probably mean an all-out arms race. Few people realize how precarious our remaining legal agreements with Moscow are: the first 1972 strategic arms limitation treaty has expired; the second treaty wasn't ratified. Each nation voluntarily observes the terms of 1972 but warily watches the other. A pebble could break the truce. . . .

So much for the foreign front. At home Reagan has an economic crisis even before he leaves California. The Kemp-Roth program threatens to bite him. It has been the theory of supply-side economics that tax cuts would pay for themselves; that if the rich and the corporations got tax breaks they would invest them in more stocks and bonds, in plants and equipment. The consequent prosperity would trickle down to the masses. Wall Street was delighted with the tax breaks but never quite thought they would end inflation or withdraw that terrible tight-money program of the Federal Reserve System.

As this is written Wall Street has the jitters. It may be a passing phase and soon cured. But the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which rose to 1,015 at Reagan's election, was down recently to 900. The bond market has slumped, too. You can buy a triple-A rated AT&T bond nominally yielding 8¾ percent for $670, or a Bankers Trust bond (nominal yield 8⅛ percent) for $600. Reagan used optimistic figures in estimating his Kemp-Roth bonanza. Maybe his predictions will be true, yet. But the deficit this year of $42.4 billion which he forecast will be $20 billion higher. And the rosy glow of other estimates may just be the reflection of red ink.

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CORRESPONDENCE

VIETNAM VETS

To the editors:

I was rather surprised by the narrow understanding of the Vietnam veteran's plight, apparent in Timothy Noah's recent article ("The Vet Offensive," *TNR*, August 1 & 8). He certainly gives the impression he knows little of the special duress under which soldiers fought in Vietnam and of the unwelcome many of them received when they returned home. Perhaps he should talk more with those who go to the outreach centers—the vets and counselors—and less to politicians and VA officials.

One example of Noah's limited view is his handling of the Agent Orange issue. Of course "there's no body of medical evidence" to show the especially harmful effects of AO, for the VA has refused to consider seriously those who claim to be its victims. It may be true, as Noah notes, that only 1,200 Americans handled AO, but many more served on the ground sprayed with the chemical and drank water tainted by the lethal, non-water-soluble dioxin that is a component of AO. Further research on the possible health and genetic damage of AO raises another frightening specter as well. What about the thousands of Vietnamese who were sprayed by AO during the war and still live in affected areas today? Perhaps the US government and populace are not prepared to confront such a potential burden of guilt.

John A. Larkin
State University of New York at Buffalo
Buffalo, New York

PEPPERY SAGES

To the editors:

In his analysis of the Israeli election results ("The Beginning of Begin's Troubles," *TNR*, July 18) Martin Peretz misrepresents Agudath Israel in a grotesquely mean-spirited manner so totally out of character for your magazine. May I cite several examples:

The group is termed "ultra-Orthodox." The prefix "ultra" denotes "excessive, extreme" (Random House Dictionary). By whose criteria? Agudath Israel is trying to preserve a three-millennia-old tradition, which, in turn, has preserved the Jews for over three millennia.

"On any major issue they go for instructions to the geriatric Council of Torah Sages." While "geriatric" means elderly, it is usually employed in connection with the infirmities and illnesses of old age. If I wanted to focus on the seniority of some of the council's members, I would have said "venerable"—but then, I venerate them, and Peretz obviously doesn't. These men are not Golden Age retirees. They are active leaders, ministering to the spiritual, emotional, and often temporal needs of their followers. We Jews, more than others, do revere age ("Torah scholars grow wiser with years"—Babylonian Talmud), but I've yet to hear anyone dismiss President Reagan or the pope as a geriatric leader.

"It's their fellow travelers whom you see pictured in the papers burning the Israeli flag in Brooklyn." That's the Neturei Karta you're knocking. They do not vote at Israeli elections, nor—for sure—would they negotiate with Begin for the rights of the religious community at large, with which (including Agudath Israel) they have no relationship.

May I suggest that Martin Peretz do some once-over-lightly investigating before his next report.

Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, editor
The Jewish Observer
New York, New York

HUMANIST HERITAGE

To the editors:

Ignorance of humanism, secular or otherwise, is not limited to the clashing armies held up to ridicule in Charles Krauthammer's article ("The Humanist Phantom," *TNR*, July 25). It extends to writers who take it upon themselves to define humanism, glance at the critics in the Moral Majority, then piously cry "a plague on both your houses."

As it is understood in the modern philosophical sense, humanism is our intellectual heritage from the 18th century—rational, skeptical, ironic, and completely dedicated to recognizable human goals. The basic tenets of humanism are quite simple. First, what is good for people is good for society (and the state). Second, our judgments on morals, government, law, economics, and education are to be based upon human reason and not on supernatural intervention or divine guidance. Third, humanism believes in individual freedom of choice as opposed to religious determinism, and so every individual is responsible for his or her actions.

The issue is whether we want to give political and economic power to fanatic, electronic evangelicals who think they have a divine, Biblical mandate to rule over the minds (and souls?) of us lesser mortals. The Moral Majority is right in one respect. Humanism is pervasive in the civilized world. We don't plan to give an inch, so help us god.

Stephen S. Fenichell, treasurer
American Humanist Association
Amherst, New York

To the editors:

Strange how old theological-philosophic issues and quarrels pop up in new guises in succeeding generations, usually on a descending scale of vulgarity. The hounds of heaven are certainly on the wrong track when they ascribe a breakdown in morals to humanism or the humanities. Humanism was and is a doctrine of classic restraint; of studying the highest, most transcendant creations of poor sinful man; of modeling themselves and all whom they influenced on the highest conceptions of human moral potential. The Humanist Manifestos to a great extent do humanists ill service. The manifestos show what the scientific fallacy can do to the once pure strain of humanism.

Frederic E. Pamp
Rockport, Massachusetts

To the editors:

I would like to thank Charles Krauthammer for his compassionate and understanding article on the current imbroglio over secular humanism. If, as the fundamentalist clergymen maintain, secular humanism is a conspiracy by a small number of evil men and women, then it would be less dangerous. Rather than a movement, however, secular humanism consists of a number of assumptions held by many, perhaps most, of those at the pinnacles of the academic, legal, and journalistic professions, the civil service, and even the business community and the military.

In corrupting middle America the haute bourgeoisie is not only contributing to the national decline, it is undermining the foundations of its own authority.

John Engelman
Santa Clara, California

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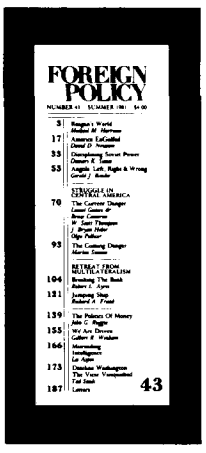

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

SEPTEMBER 9, 1981

OFF TRIPOLI'S SHORES

Nothing has better dramatized the contrast between the Reagan and Carter administrations in managing foreign policy than the shoot-out over the Gulf of Sidra. President Carter canceled the Sixth Fleet's regular missile tests in that area last fall to avoid a confrontation with Libya. President Reagan reversed that policy, knowing full well that American planes might be challenged (the issue was discussed in a National Security Council meeting), and US pilots were ordered to fire back if fired upon. Carter's decision was colored by the time and the circumstances—he didn't want another Mideast blow-up with the Iran hostage crisis still unresolved, his brother's seamy ties with Libya were under investigation, and the election campaign was in full swing. If US planes had won a dogfight with the Libyans last fall, Carter would have been accused of staging an international conflict to save his political hide. Given Carter's lousy luck, we might even have lost the dogfight, or won it and then suffered casualties in a ship crash or a missile misfire.

With the Sidra shoot-out, the Reagan administration has definitely laid to rest what might well be called the post-Iran syndrome. The administration knew that US forces had every right to hold exercises in the Gulf of Sidra, and that the principle of free passage on the high seas was being challenged by Muammar Qaddafi's claim that the gulf is part of Libya's territorial waters. That claim, incidentally, is recognized by no other country, not even Qaddafi's ally, the Soviet Union. International law does recognize some bays and gulfs as belonging to coastal nations, but only when the mouth of the waterway is less than 24 miles across. Sidra's is nearly 300 miles across, making it clearly part of the Mediterranean Sea. Three miles of the gulf's waters would be Libya's, according to existing international law, recognized by the United States. Twelve miles might be Libya's if a Law of the Sea treaty ever were adopted. But under no circumstances except an exercise of raw power could Qaddafi extend his sovereignty out to a distance of 60 miles—where the aerial confrontation took place—and the Reagan administration has established that we have the greater power, as well as principle, on our side.

This was not an accidental confrontation, but neither was it the result of US provocation. Nor was it a rash act. It was debated at the highest levels of the government, and discussed in detail with the naval task force commander, who was called to Washington for consultations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was Libya which somehow miscalculated. Its planes fired first (as even Qaddafi now admits, after an initial lie), and its planes were shot down.

The Reagan policy in the Gulf of Sidra grew out of a wider policy toward Libya and toward America's role as a great power, which also sharply contrasts with the policies of his predecessor. Reagan may be simple-minded about the complexities of foreign policy, but he knows an enemy when he sees one. Carter kept hoping for better relations—"constructive dialogue"—with all countries, no matter how hostile or maniacal, and went to some lengths to build them. In spite of Qaddafi's support for international terrorists and his export of instability throughout Africa and the Middle East, the Carter administration in 1978 and 1979 agreed to resume sales of civilian airliners to Libya when Libya signaled a willingness to sign the Hague anti-hijacking convention and to promise that the aircraft would not be put to military use—though in the end, Carter called off the deal after the Libyan dictator used American C-130 transport planes, delivered in

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1971, to try to keep Idi Amin in power in Uganda.

At the outset of his administration, Carter also reversed a policy presumption inherited from the Nixon-Ford era, that if Libya and Egypt ever were engaged in a military clash and the Soviet Union threatened to intervene on Libya's side, the United States would intervene to protect Egypt. It isn't clear that Anwar Sadat ever seriously considered a full-scale attack on Libya—the worst that ever occurred was a brief 1977 border skirmish—but the Carter administration made it clear he could not count on us if he did try anything. Egypt has 20 times Libya's population and eight times its military manpower, but the Carter administration reportedly thought that an Egyptian attack could, at best, result in the capture of Libya's eastern oil fields, but not in a popular uprising against Qaddafi or the capture of Tripoli. And if Egyptian forces got bogged down, Carter aides were afraid that Qaddafi might get quick help from Cuban forces in Ethiopia, that the Egyptian army might be humiliated, or even that Sadat might be toppled from power. It's impossible for us to judge whether all these concerns were justified—and the Reagan administration, drawing up its contingency plans, ought to consider them carefully—but when the word got out that the United States was holding Sadat back, that eliminated a threat against Qaddafi and freed his forces for meddling elsewhere in the Sahara and, ultimately, farther south.

Perhaps the bluntest, toughest action Carter ever took toward Libya occurred after US intelligence developed airtight information that terrorists were training on Libya's behalf to assassinate Hermann Eilts, US ambassador in Cairo. Carter wrote Qaddafi a stiff note detailing what the United States knew and informing Qaddafi that if any attack took place, this country would hold him "directly and personally responsible," though it isn't clear what that meant. In spite of all the history, though, Carter still considered Libya as a possible go-between in securing release of US hostages and even allowed his brother to be seduced onto the Libyan payroll.

The Reagan administration knows better, and we are glad of it. Qaddafi is the sworn enemy of our friends and our interests. He provides a stockpile of $12 billion worth of Soviet weaponry in North Africa. He funds and trains terrorists for operations from the Philippines to Northern Ireland. He apparently wants to create an empire stretching across most of the top half of Africa. And he has made several attempts to acquire nuclear weapons. He is, as a top Reagan official put it, "a menace that we would like to see disappear."

He is not likely to disappear by himself, unfortunately, but it is problematical what the United States can do to ease his way. Obviously we would not approve a US plot to assassinate even him. All that was tried with Castro long ago and failed; it's a dangerous, two-sided game. What the US can do in the way of rousing opposition to him among his citizenry and military, it obviously should do. Certainly we should protect anti-Qaddafi elements among Libyan students in this country against Qaddafi agents who harass and even shoot them. But most of all, the Reagan administration needs a strategy to thwart Qaddafi's expansion.

Whether such a strategy exists isn't clear. It was encouraging that the CIA was considering a covert operation to buy back the loyalty of politicians falling under Libyan influence in Mauritius, a strategically located island nation in the Indian Ocean. The long-range purpose was to prevent that country's government from providing naval bases to the Soviet fleet. However, the CIA's former chief spymaster, Max Hugel, apparently so ineptly presented the agency's plan to the House Intelligence Committee that some of its members called for the operation to be canceled. Hugel, before he was fired for concealing securities violations, was barred from further congressional testimony. The administration seems to have the right idea—to stop Qaddafi from using his oil wealth and his weaponry to destabilize the region. If it could—and we hope it can—the administration would like to destabilize Qaddafi's own regime. The question remains whether the Reagan administration has the political, diplomatic, and intelligence skills to match the accuracy of its Navy pilots and planes.

To Save El Salvador

Six months ago Secretary of State Haig called the crisis in El Salvador "a textbook case of Communist aggression" and vowed to stop it by force. More recently, Thomas O. Enderse, the State Department's chief of Latin American policy, has defined the issue less simplistically. At bottom, he now says, the crisis is "Salvadorean in nature" and therefore deserves a "political solution." This is a useful change in both outlook and rhetoric which ought now to be followed by a corollary change in policy.

As the violence in El Salvador mounts to ever higher levels of brutality, the underlying political problem grows more acute. Both sides, the so-called Democratic Revolutionary Front and the Napoleon Duarte junta, contain ruthless, antidemocratic components. These factions thrive on violence, and more often than not it is they who carry the guns. When Nicaragua sends arms to the rebel side, the most extreme Marxist-Leninist battalions receive them. And when the United States pours more weaponry into El Salvador than even Duarte wants, it plays into the hands of the far right and, by extension, the far left. The increasingly autonomous Salvadorean military sees Pentagon gift packages as a green light for lawlessness and political murder; the hard-liners of the left have

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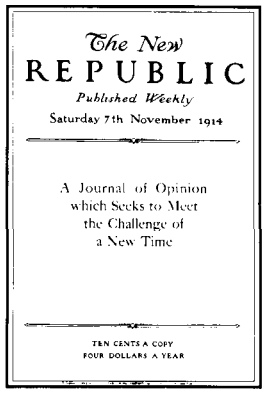
new evidence of "imperialist intervention" and the uselessness of peaceful methods. Those who profess commitment to democratic values—represented in the junta by Duarte and the remaining civilian members, and on the other side by Guillermo Ungo, head of the Social Democrats, and the activists of the Roman Catholic church—are less and less able to restrain their authoritarian allies. The logic of polarization—in which the armed forces shade imperceptibly into the terrorist right and impatient liberals blindly make common cause with Communists—becomes more and more relentless. Anyone who advocates anything less than annihilation of the opposition soon finds himself on his own friends' hit list.

There are signs that moderate elements on both sides would welcome—and, with US encouragement, participate in—a reversal of this gruesome process. The aim of American policy now should be to help unite the democrats of both the junta and the revolutionary front against the authoritarians of right and left. The only way to craft such a coalition is for the United States to use its very considerable influence to press for political negotiations, while firmly isolating the right-wing murder squads and continuing to press to keep Communist arms out of the country. There is both logic and hope in the view of Robert White, the former US ambassador to El Salvador, who points out in an interview in the current issue of the *Progressive*: "Duarte and Ungo have far more in common than Duarte has with Colonel Moran of the Treasury Police, or than Ungo has with the guerrilla leader [Salvador Cayetano] Capio. Both sides have to face the fact that they've got indigestible, antidemocratic elements of considerable power within their coalitions, and the way to isolate them is to get together." Several nations, including Mexico, Venezuela, West Germany, and France, would eagerly join in an attempt at political reconciliation. With over 20,000 already dead in El Salvador, it would be both wrong and unwise to pass up the possibility of at once ending the bloodshed and advancing democracy and moderation in the region. By reuniting Duarte and Ungo, who were presidential running mates in 1972, a strategy of political negotiations might work. Clearly it is worth trying.

CHANGES

The New Republic has a new distributor—Select Magazines, Inc.—and, through Select's good offices, this issue of *TNR* is available on an unprecedentedly large number of newsstands throughout the United States. To readers who, as a consequence, are seeing us for the first time, we bid welcome.

Readers of longer standing will notice, in this issue, substantial changes in the design of the magazine. These changes have been made in the interest of simplicity, utility, and general appeal. We hope you will be pleased by our new look; but if you find yourself vaguely upset or disoriented by it, do not be alarmed. This is a perfectly normal reaction to any change in the appearance of a familiar journal of opinion, and will soon pass.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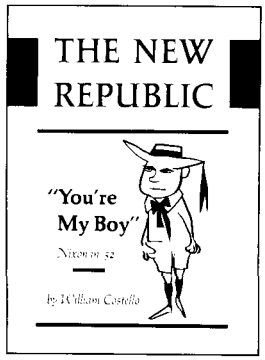

NOVEMBER 2, 1959

The present redesign is the third major overhaul in *TNR*'s history. The original Caslon Old Style format by Ingalls Kimball, austere and restrained, persisted almost unchanged from the magazine's first issue (November 7, 1914) until 1946. Over the next 13 years *TNR*'s design seemed to change almost yearly, but in general the magazine's look during those years was punchy, overexcited, and self-consciously "popular." With the issue of September 28, 1959, an entirely new design, by Noel Martin, was introduced. As elegant as the 1914 design but far more modern in spirit, it was one of the most successful of magazine formats, and one of the most durable. Since 1959 there has been a gradual accumulation of small and often uncoordinated alterations. It seemed time for a new coat of paint.

The new look was conceived of as a totality, but it is less sweeping than it appears, and it remains true to the spirit not only of Noel Martin's design but of Ingalls Kimball's as well. On the cover, the two rectangular blocks that used to flank the logotype—variously called, around the office, "ears," "mourning bands," or just "those things"—are gone. The logotype itself is thicker, bolder, and more compact, and is outlined for emphasis. The cover illustration is enclosed in a frame of solid color. Inside, the contents page has been moved to a right-hand page and redesigned to convey more information about the articles in the magazine. The principal headline typeface remains Palatino Bold, but with the important difference that the type is set in large and small capitals instead of in upper and lower case. The text typeface, Palatino, is unchanged. The two-point rule that runs

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across the top of each page is designed to lend unity and dash to our defiantly word-filled pages.

Richard Jester, a publication and graphic designer whose previous clients have ranged from *New West* magazine and the late Washington Star to the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus, is the designer of *TNR*'s new look. Kathy Sullivan and her team at 19th St. Graphix provided crucial assistance. Jim Parkinson redrew the cover logotype. Kenny Grady redrew the distinctive colophon which appears on the redesigned opening page of editorial comment, restoring *TNR*'s sailing ship to its original 1914 seaworthiness. Elizabeth Dixon served as a design consultant.

Also with this issue, James K. Glassman joins *The New Republic* as publisher. He succeeds Robert A. Cohen, who leaves after two years of valuable service to become associate publisher and general manager of *Technology*, a new monthly science magazine. Mr. Glassman was most recently executive editor of the *Washingtonian* magazine. He has served as editor and publisher of weekly newspapers in Massachusetts and Louisiana. As a writer, he has published articles in *Forbes*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, the Washington Post, and *The New Republic*, for which he will continue to write while he directs the magazine's circulation and advertising efforts.

Trendiness is next to godliness.

Holy Fools

The Central Committee met in East Germany last week. East German Communist party chief Erich Honecker welcomed the group of leaders from around the world to Dresden with a message calling for an end to the nuclear arms race. The group's deputy general secretary responded by thanking the government of the German Democratic Republic for its "remarkable cooperation." The general secretary of the group made his usual speech defending its support of liberation movements throughout the world and attacking racism and "the mad race for nuclear superiority." He reserved a special word for those who "as soon as vested interests are involved . . . either claim ignorance of the diagnosis of the ills of our society . . . or say they are not involved in politics." Yes, it was time for another meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

In 1978 the WCC achieved a certain renown when it gave a grant of $85,000 to the Patriotic Front in Rhodesia. The grant caused an uproar because it was given not by some camera-hungry preacher holding hands with Yassar Arafat in a swaying chorus of "We Shall Overcome," but by what has been called "the foremost institutional bearer of the ecumenical movement." Richard John Neuhaus, a Lutheran pastor and senior editor of *Worldview*, has written that "except for the Vatican there is no other international association of Christians that can compete effectively with the WCC's claims to authority." That authority, at least in part, is a function of the council's size and history. It represents most of the Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, and Old Catholic churches of the world. It is composed of 300 member churches in more than 100 countries. Its history stretches back to the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910. In the early years, it tried to open dialogue between the churches on questions of theology and practice. Later, it became increasingly concerned with the notion of service. After the 1948 assembly in Amsterdam, where the World Council of Churches was officially established, the WCC underwent a gradual transformation parallel to that of the United Nations. It experienced a steady increase in third world participation, rapid growth of an international bureaucracy in Geneva, and, finally, a crisis of conscience among its Western members, chiefly as a result of the Vietnam War. By the late 1960s, the WCC had decided that its business—and God's—was liberation. To be sure, unlike many Latin American Catholic priests, it did not engage directly in the struggle; it simply financed it. In 1970 it began doling out money to various liberation groups. But since the scriptures are somewhat vague on the question of which African guerrillas are entitled to a Christian tithe, the WCC did make some errors. In the early 1970s, for example, it gave money to Joseph Savimbi's UNITA and to Bishop Muzorewa and the Reverend Sithole in Rhodesia. Savimbi lost his grant in 1975 for having committed the theological error of losing Luanda and most of the rest of Angola to the Cubans. Muzorewa lost his grant in 1977 for another doctrinal heresy: he made peace with the enemy before having achieved total victory. Soon after the Rhodesian internal settlement was announced, Muzorewa's one-third share of the WCC's grant was taken away and given to the Popular Front. Blessed are the peacemakers; unless they leave the whites with too many seats in parliament.

Aside from grants to African guerrillas, the WCC has given antiracism grants for Koreans in Japan; Aborigines in Australia; Maoris in New Zealand; Indians in North and South America; Eskimos in Canada; blacks, Haitians, Chicanos, and farm workers in the US; and Moroccans in France, among others. There is not a penny to suggest that there may be racial or ethnic problems in black Africa, Indochina, Asia, or the Soviet bloc. One might, for example, have thought that if ethnic repression in the Soviet bloc would not move the WCC, then religious repression would. At the 1975 WCC assembly in Nairobi, efforts to condemn Soviet restrictions on religious liberty were

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defeated. About all the assembly could bring itself to do was to resolve to note that it had "devoted a substantial period to the discussion of the alleged denials of religious liberty in the USSR."

Predicting who will be condemned by the WCC is easy. It has nothing to do with the relative level of violation of human rights, as documented, for example, by Amnesty International. A practically infallible predictor of who will be singled out by the WCC is a country's ideological affinity with the US. Of the 1980 antiracism grants, for example, only a single one was awarded for the Caribbean. "Its objective is to serve as an agent for decolonization . . . in the current situation of heightened repression against sectors of the society demanding justice and liberation." The grant was for Puerto Rico. Contrast this to a report on Cuba's "thin, healthy church" in the current issue of *One World*, the WCC magazine. When the writer arrived at the Matanzas Evangelical Seminary he found it not only thin but also empty. All the students and professors were 25 miles away, harvesting tomatoes on a state farm. The effect on the writer was electric: "For us the tomato harvest became a symbol of evangelical action, of state-church collaboration, of the church side by side with the working people." Other signs of church-state collaboration were noted: "Whereas 85 percent of Cubans were baptized as a matter of course before 1959, Catholic parents today have to follow baptism preparation courses in which they are urged to take seriously their responsibility in Christian education." This oblique—and apparently approving—allusion to the power of religious persecution to concentrate the mind on one's religious responsibilities is accompanied by still other theological insights. Not only has "Cuba demonstrated for us the superiority of a planned socialist economy" (a demonstration apparently lost on the 100,000 Cubans who fled last year), but Cubans "consider their choice of a socialist society as irreversible." The notion that the Cubans have chosen socialism is a curious one in light of the fact that Castro has yet to hold a free election, in contrast to, say, Puerto Rico where every few years "colonization" (i.e., commonwealth status or statehood) receives overwhelming popular endorsement in democratic elections.

LAST year, to put its politics on a solid doctrinal footing, the WCC put out an interesting exegesis of its liberation theology. Its title is "Toward a Church in Solidarity With the Poor." Its purpose is to create "a theology of the underside of history." Its vocabulary is arcane and scholastic, though familiar enough to any Dresden young pioneer. "Liberation praxis," "contradictions in current socioeconomic structures," "correct analysis of objective conditions," the need to reject "a *petit bourgeois* world view"—that sort of thing. And the pamphlet is adorned with cartoons like one showing a huge bloated capitalist in top hat, cigar, and pinstripes, holding a magnet that sucks coins out of a straw hat entitled "third world." The rest of the text is literally a poor man's Marxism: a history of poverty which begins with its invention by capitalism and which will end with its abolition by the "rationalization and control of consumption" and the "socialization of production." In any other context, these views would be rather commonplace, but when they pretend to be theology they lead the WCC into some difficult straits—at one point, a veiled but no less astonishing rejection of charity for focusing on working *for* the poor instead of "attacking the oppressive forces that generate impoverishment." Or, as another official WCC paper put it somewhat more bluntly, the council must "move beyond charity and involve itself in the redistribution of power."

THE SPIRIT of revolutionary consciousness, with its attendant Western self-loathing, was best captured by Robert McAfee Brown, a prominent professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, in his keynote address at Nairobi. His very existence as an affluent white male American, he said, made him a symbol of racism, sexism, classism, and imperialism. He then proceeded to confess publicly the sins of his country, the evil it does "and continues to do to so many of your countries." He then switched from English to Spanish to avoid the very language of imperialism.

By the time the WCC got to Dresden last week, some member groups had had enough. On August 24, the Salvation Army finally pulled out. It was weary of an organization that busies itself with declarations that "capitalist forces in the international and national spheres join together to oppress the poor and keep them under domination." And that in the West "the minority which controls and orients the use of international capital" in its quest for "international domination" will resort to any means for "guaranteeing the profits of the privileged" including "resort[ing] to totalitarian regimes for whom torture and terror have become the usual means of government." (With ecumenical evenhandedness, the WCC added its finding that "on the other hand . . . there is evidence that [in Communist countries] not all freedoms are guaranteed to collectivities and individuals.")

The only possible defense for the WCC's politics is that they promote a certain institutional self-interest. It is quite clear that many, if not most, non-Western member churches would not be permitted by their governments to participate in the WCC if it criticized the regimes back home. One can sympathize with this concern. Western Christians want to retain contact and dialogue with their co-religionists in East Germany, for example. To dwell on the sins of Honecker and his regime would jeopardize this connection. The WCC may, indeed, be forced into a self-censorship in which the only countries it can denounce are precisely those which practice toleration. But, under these cir-

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cumstances, the WCC should be expected to exercise more humility and less self-righteousness regarding matters political. It might even try to express some sympathy, if not appreciation, for those nations which practice toleration. But it simply exposes itself to ridicule when, instead, it seeks to solve its dilemma by invoking a sadly secondhand liberation theology to derive divine sanction for a politics of selective vilification.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Anti-Semitism goes respectable.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE HILL

THE *Spotlight*, a weekly tabloid published by an ultra-right-wing organization called the Liberty Lobby, bills itself as "The Paper You Can Trust." It claims to report the news the other papers miss and to uncover the conspiracies the other papers dare not expose. The *Spotlight* never lets its readers forget that it was first to rip the lid off the world-conquering intentions of the Bilderberg Group and the Trilateral Commission. More recently, the *Spotlight* has been exposing other conspiracies against American freedom, including plots by the Internal Revenue Service to harass tax protesters and conspiracies by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to arrest stalwarts of the Ku Klux Klan, the Christian-Patriots Defense League, and the American "Nazi" party (quotation marks are one of the *Spotlight*'s many stylistic idiosyncracies).

But the *Spotlight*'s fundamental editorial obsession is with the "Zionists" and "dual loyalist" friends of Israel who conspire to take over the US government and to propagate the malicious fiction that the Nazis killed six million Jews. In recent months, the *Spotlight* seems to have become a veritable cheering section for the Institute for Historical Review in Torrance, California. This is the organization whose pseudonymous director Lewis Brandon (in reality a British professional racist named David McCalden) recently offered $50,000 to anyone who could prove Jews were gassed at Auschwitz. The Institute organizes annual conferences on why the Holocaust didn't happen and publishes a quarterly, *Journal of Historical Review*, which features the works of such enlightened savants as Robert Faurisson, the French literature professor recently found guilty of falsifying history and given a 3-month suspended prison sentence. The astuteness of the institute's scholarship can be discerned in the title of a few of the *Journal*'s recent articles: "The Mendacity of Zion," "The Holocaust and the Myth of the Past as History," "The Fake Photograph Problem," and "Human Soap."

The *Spotlight* maintains that the Institute for Historical Review and the Liberty Lobby are "unrelated," although a recent *Spotlight* article did acknowledge that the two organizations have one officer in common. This is Willis A. Carto, reported to be the founder and chief financier of both the Library Lobby and the institute. The *Spotlight* frequently runs articles promoting the institute's views and exposing alleged Zionist plots to knock the institute out of commission. The March 23 *Spotlight* featured a two-page spread under the byline of Lewis Brandon and the following headline: "Gathering of 'Liberators' May Expose Allied War Atrocities; Believers in the 'Holocaust' have invited the 'liberators' of the concentration camps to gather for a convention. But to show up would be tantamount to admitting having murdered innocent German guards."

Other recent *Spotlight* headlines pursue the same theme: "Jewish Groups Can't Defend Position on '6 Million' Debate" (February 2); "Anne Frank Fable Losing Credibility; Establishment Continues to Push 'Diary' as 'True Story' Despite Contradictions" (December 1, 1980). Even the most cursory examination of any of these treatises is enough to put to rest the claims of Liberty Lobby spokesmen that the lobby and its newspaper are not anti-Semitic, but merely "anti-Zionist."

On the basis of these texts alone, it might be possible to dismiss the *Spotlight*'s progenitors as a bunch of anachronistic and hallucinatory cranks. Indeed, so extreme are the Liberty Lobby and its newspaper that they often seem estranged from even the fringes of the far right. The *Spotlight* has criticized Senator Jesse Helms and Representative Larry McDonald (of the John Birch Society) for employing "Zionist" or "Mossad" agents on their staffs. The Liberty Lobby and its newspaper also seem eager to scorn some of the more important money-men of the more conventional ultra-right. Thus a recent *Spotlight* scoop on "perverts" in government contained the following astonishing paragraph: "Joseph Coors, the beer maker, has supported homosexual causes and actively recruited homosexual employees. Interestingly, Coors also loudly proclaims his "conservatism."

YOU MIGHT suppose that the Liberty Lobby's views on some of its fellow conservatives—to say nothing of its opinions on Jews—would be enough to make a political leper out of anyone who even briefly flirted with the Liberty Lobby crowd. But this is not the case. The Reagan administration proposed Warren Richardson, the Liberty Lobby's one-time general counsel, to become an assistant secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services. The nomination was later withdrawn after Jewish groups protested, although Richardson still maintains he doesn't

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hate Jews and only took a job at the Liberty Lobby for the money. After leaving the Liberty Lobby, Richardson became a private lobbyist for various new right causes and a member of an informal circle of right-wing political strategists known as the Six-Pack because it meets under the auspices of the Heritage Foundation, which Joseph Coors helped to found and finance. But more alarming than the easy entrée afforded an ex-Liberty Lobbyist into the salons of what passed today for mainstream conservatism is the mass exposure the Liberty Lobby now seems to be able to obtain for its bizarre doctrines.

IF *SPOTLIGHT* circulation figures are to be believed —even if they are discounted by half—the newspaper has a large readership. Last winter the *Spotlight* held a gala at the National Press Club to celebrate its achievement of a circulation goal of one-third million. That's more than *The New Republic*, the *National Review*, and the *Nation* combined. The *Spotlight* claims paid circulation; that means all those 333,334 subscribers pay up to 50 cents each week to read its rantings. Furthermore, the *Spotlight* regularly publishes a list of around 400 radio stations that it says carry a five-minute daily "This is Liberty Lobby" broadcast. (I've heard them in Washington on WEAM-AM at 6:30 pm daily.) Twenty TV stations are listed as carrying a weekly Liberty Lobby TV program, "Spotlight on the News," hosted by Liberty Lobby board-of-policy chairman Robert Bartell, a jovial man who resembles Captain Kangaroo.

The *Spotlight*'s credibility is greatly enhanced by the casual way in which some Congressmen use the *Spotlight* and related media to publicize their views and themselves. During the past year or so, Senate Majority Whip Ted Stevens, Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Alan Simpson all have been featured guests on the *Spotlight*'s TV show. One *Spotlight* article has appeared under Hatch's byline and two have appeared under Simpson's byline. Several members of the House—Republican Representatives L.A. "Skip" Bafalis of Florida, Ron Paul of Texas, and Bill Dickinson of Alabama—write for the *Spotlight* more frequently. Representative George Hansen of Idaho, who is described in a *Spotlight* caption as "our good friend," acknowledges that "there are some people at the *Spotlight* who argue about the Holocaust." But, he insisted to me, "I told them they ought to drop it because it might distract from an otherwise good publication. I frankly know they get into trouble because of things that are Jewish and things that happened in Nazi Germany. But I'm not a book burner." Hansen then suggested I was implying guilt by association and was seeking to stifle his freedom of expression. He said he'd just as easily give an interview to a Communist magazine as he would to the *Spotlight*. "In the end," he added, "it comes down to a case of who's got the biggest audience."

Senator Ted Stevens's administrative assistant, Dennis Fradley, said that Stevens probably would give another interview to the *Spotlight* TV show if it were on one of his pet subjects, such as guns or mineral development, but that he probably would not grant similar access to a Communist reporter. Representative Dickinson's administrative aide, Jay Steen, acknowledged that Dickinson "agrees with [the *Spotlight*'s] philosophies much of the time but not 100 percent." On the subject of Jews, Steen said, the Liberty Lobby is "obviously rather radical." Senator Simpson's spokesman, Don Hardy, at first insisted it would be a "very dangerous game" if Senators were forced to choose which media they gave interviews to on the basis of politics. But Hardy then ruined his own argument by mentioning that Simpson recently declined an interview request from Penthouse on the grounds that associating with such a magazine might not impress the puritans in Wyoming.

To be sure, a few aides appeared embarrassed that the *Spotlight* had been running articles by their bosses. Jack Kemp's byline appeared over a *Spotlight* item about Reagan's economic plan on June 22, but Kemp's spokesman, John Mueller, said the article was not authorized. "It's obviously not Jack's style, considering his support for Israel." Christopher Robling, spokesman for Representative George O'Brien, an Illinois Republican who was credited for writing an item in the May 18 *Spotlight*, also disowned the article. O'Brien is "not even that conservative. He voted for Legal Services," Robling protested. Representative Jim Collins, Republican of Texas, gave the *Spotlight* two lavish interviews on legislative topics earlier this year, complete with pictures of the *Spotlight*'s managing editor conducting the interview in Collin's office. Collins's press secretary now says the legislator has "recently become aware of some of [the *Spotlight*'s] anti-Israel positions. He's a big supporter of Israel." According to the aide, Collins recently sent the Liberty Lobby and the *Spotlight* a letter instructing them never again to use his name in their promotional literature.

No one disputes the *Spotlight*'s right to publish whatever delusions it likes. But without the congressional ornamentation, the paper's credibility might disappear in a whirlwind of self-parody. Most of the representatives and aides I interviewed agreed with me that the *Spotlight* is "anti-Jewish." Yet some legislators, even as they profess to repudiate the *Spotlight*'s line on Jews, continue to abet the publication by affording it and its satellites the appearance—or the reality—of special access to the knowledgeable and powerful. Isn't it time they pulled the plug?

MARK HOSENBALL

Mark Hosenball is a Washington reporter for Fairchild Publications.

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President Reagan wants to cut benefits by more than one-third for over 70 percent of those who retire next year. The worker who retires at age 62 could lose up to $160 a month; by 1986 the loss for an early retiree would more than double. Benefits would also be reduced for families, disabled persons, and workers retiring at 65.

President Reagan's cruelest cut will hurt those of us who must retire early. Over 70 percent of all early retirees don't have a choice. Some are in poor health. Others have lost their jobs. And many more workers, counting on the government's word, have made irreversible decisions to retire.

Right now, the axe is about to fall on the minimum Social Security benefit of $122 a month. This cut will directly hurt more than 1.5 million Americans, many of them women over 70.

President Reagan says he's cutting Social Security to save it. His strategy is to make people believe the system will go bankrupt if benefits aren't cut drastically. That's not true. The cuts President Reagan proposes aren't needed. Even worse, they'd come out of the modest $7,000 the average retired couple on Social Security gets per year. That's not much to live on.

Sure, our Social Security system has problems, caused by high unemployment and inflation. But there are ways to solve them without breaking government's promises to working Americans.

The immediate problem lies within just one of the three Social Security trust funds. The other two trust funds are financially healthy. Simple bookkeeping changes would allow them to make temporary loans to the one fund that needs help.

For a longer-term solution, we should fund Social Security from general tax revenues. Just about every other country does.

Improvements like these would *strengthen* Social Security. They wouldn't undermine it, as President Reagan's plan would do.

Together, we can stop these unfair cuts. Send a letter or mailgram, or call, your U.S. Senators and Representative. Tell them you want the federal government to keep its word. Tell them you've paid into Social Security and want it to be there when you need it.

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MARVIN JERKOFSKY: The president urges support for his policies, but leading opposition spokesmen express objections. Negotiations proceed in major trouble spots, amidst increasing criticism of the current approach. Concern mounts in Washington about any number of things. Life on earth continues, but doubts arise about its purpose or justification. Hugh, how do you like my new tie?

HUGH SIDEWALL: You know, Marvin, we sit here in Washington pretending that we have some kind of special insight into the world, and really we don't know much more than anyone else. As for all the issues you raise, they're important issues, and they'll all have to be studied with care, with very great care indeed, and in fact, if anything is clear at all—which I doubt—it is that these very troubling questions are being deeply considered by some of the finest minds in town, who agree—to a man, I might say, or a woman, Elizabeth—that these are all very, very difficult challenges for the nation. But as for what comes next, we just can't say, Marvin. It's too early to tell.

JERKOFSKY: I see. Well, tell me this, Hugh. If, as you seem to suggest, you know nothing about anything, why do I pay you to drone on week after week on my show?

SIDEWALL: Well, you know, Marvin, that's a very good question, and it's one I've heard being asked at the very highest reaches of government in my major lunches around Washington and in traveling across the entire country. But there are no conclusions at this point, and we'll just have to wait and see. It's hard to say. No one knows for sure. Any guess would be premature.

JERKOFSKY: Hugh, do you have any brains left at all?

SIDEWALL: I don't know, Marvin. We just can't say.

JERKOFSKY: George?

GEORGE III: On the subject of Hugh's brain, Marvin, I'm reminded of Samuel Johnson's remark that the prospect of a hanging concentrates the mind wonderfully. Foolish consistency, Marvin, is the hobgoblin of small minds, as Emerson so aptly put it. And I believe it was Pope who said, "'Tis education forms the common mind: Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined." But the Bible says, "A fool uttereth all his mind." And what fools these mortals be, as Shakespeare so wisely observed.

JERKOFSKY: Thank you, George. Haynes?

HAYNES UNDERWEAR: Marvin, I was interested in Hugh's remark about traveling across the entire country, because frankly, Hugh, I think that's my turf, if you don't mind. I'm just back from Out There, as a matter of fact, taking the pulse of the nation, speaking to millions of ordinary Americans, be they shopkeepers, or baseball fans, or Presbyterians, and all of them agree with remarkable unanimity that this is a very crucial time for our nation. In fact, Marvin, in my entire career as a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, this is one of the most fascinating periods we have ever passed through as a country. Americans are nervous, yet they remain calm. They have lost faith, yet they retain, I think, an underlying confidence. They are certain, yet somehow unsure. It's hard to define, Marvin, but it's definitely there. I know, because I've talked to every single one of them. For me to pass among the American people at this fleeting yet crucial moment in history, touching an outstretched hand here, accepting a gentle kiss on the foot there, was as

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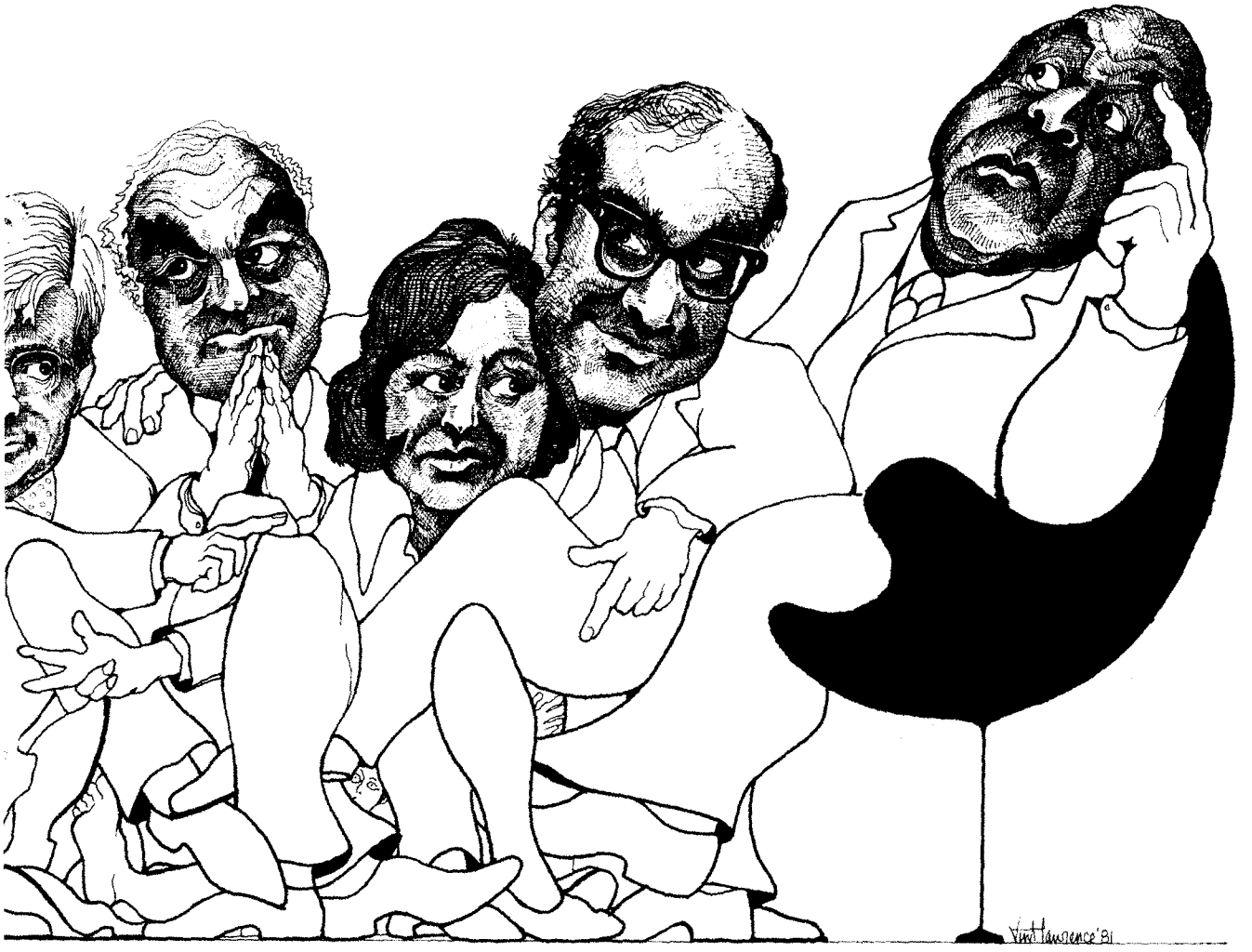

stirring and moving for me as a journalist as it was for them as the American people.

JERKOFSKY: I'm sure you're right, Haynes. Elizabeth?

MS. SHREW: I think we have to be very careful in defining our terms here, Marvin. By "people," does Haynes mean "human beings making up a group or assembly or linked by a common interest"? Or does he mean "the mass of a community as distinguished from a special class"? In talking with people—and I use that term advisedly—up on the Hill this week, I've discovered a sharp divergence of views and not a little confusion on this point.

JERKOFSKY: An important distinction, Elizabeth. Congratulations. Carl, what do you think about Elizabeth's distinction?

CARL ROLYPOLY: Wellllllll, Marrrrrrvinnnnnn, llllllllet mmmmmmme jusssssst say one llllllit-tullllll thaaaaaaaang. You knowwwwwww, it's alllllll jusssssst fine and dannnnnnn-deeeeeeeeee for Haynes and Eeeeeeelizzzzz-uh-beth to sit heeeeere and talk abouuuut . . . the peeeeeeeee-pullllllll. But what I would like to knowwwwww is thisssssssssss.

JERKOFSKY: Yes? What is it?

ROLYPOLY: What it issssssss, Marrrrrrvinnnnnnn, is jusssssssst one simmmmmpullllll quessssssss-chunnnnnnnn.

ALL: Yes? Yes?

ROLYPOLY: Myyyy quessssschunnnnnn issssss thisssssssss. Hhhhhhhwat abouuuuuut blaaaaaack peeeeeeee-pullllllll?

JERKOFSKY: A good question, Carl. Thank you. Jack?

JACK CURMUDGEON: Harrumph. Balderdash. Poppycock. Horsefeathers. Et cetera.

JERKOFSKY: That's the last word, Jack. Thank you, Elizabeth, gentlemen.

ALL (waving): Goodbye, boys and girls! See you next week!

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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Naomi Munson and James Atlas
On Norman Mailer and Jack Abbott.

THE LITERARY LIFE OF CRIME

NAOMI MUNSON

ON JULY 18, Jack Henry Abbott, a soon-to-be-paroled convict living in a halfway house, disappeared from New York City. That morning, he had been involved in a disagreement over the use of the toilet facilities in a Greenwich Village restaurant. A few minutes after the altercation began, Richard Adan, a young actor and playwright who earned his living waiting tables in his father-in-law's restaurant, lay dead in the street from a knife wound to the heart. Abbott, the only suspect in the case, is still being sought by police.

In the ordinary course of events, such a street slaying would have merited at most a paragraph or two in the New York Post, or perhaps honorable mention on one of the local TV newscasts. As it was, however, the Abbott case was hot news. The New York Times ran three stories, two on the front page; and even the national newsweeklies got in on the action.

Jack Abbott was no ordinary criminal. He was the newest darling of the New York literary establishment, contributor to the *New York Review of Books*, author of a book for Random House, protégé of Norman Mailer.

The convict and the novelist first made contact in 1977, when Abbott heard that Mailer was working on a book about Gary Gilmore. Abbott, then an inmate at a North Carolina penitentiary, wrote to warn Mailer that people on the outside understand all too little about the ugliness and violence of American prisons; he offered to fill in the gaps for Mailer, to supply a unique perspective on the life and times of Gilmore, through his own experience in the US penal system.

Abbott's experience of that system was undeniably broad and varied. At 12 years old, after years of nonadjustment to foster homes, he was sent to reform school. He was released at 18, only to find himself back—this time in grown-up jail—a few months later for stealing and trying to cash some checks. Three years later, Abbott murdered a fellow inmate of the Utah State Penitentiary. He escaped once from captivity and spent a few weeks in freedom, until he was caught robbing a bank and returned to prison. Abbott had, in short, spent his entire adulthood—and much of his childhood as well—behind bars.

Abbott spent his years of incarceration educating himself through reading. With the help of his sister and a friendly bookstore, he supplied himself with the classics of Western civilization—and some from the East as well—and read and read until he was able to drop names like Nietzsche, Kant, Kierkegaard and, of course, Marx with some degree of confidence.

Mailer was not to plumb Abbott's depths for some time. He was, however, so impressed by Abbott's "intense, direct, unadorned and detached" first leter that he accepted the offer of help. He soon found himself in the midst of a "remarkable" correspondence, as he explains in his introduction to Abbott's book. "Abbott," Mailer discovered, "had his own voice. I had heard no other like it." His letters revealed "an intellectual, a radical, a potential leader, a man obsessed with a vision of more elevated human relations in a better world." Abbott aroused "all the awe one knows before a phenomenon."

Mailer shared this phenomenon with his friends—notably Robert Silvers, editor of the *New York Review of Books*. Silvers arranged to publish a selection of the Abbott letters in his magazine, along with a brief introduction by Mailer. When they appeared, in June 1980, they caught the eye of Erroll McDonald, an enterprising young Random House editor. By the end of that summer, Abbott had acquired a book contract, a $12,500 advance on royalties, and the services of Scott Meredith, Mailer's literary agent.

By the time *In the Belly of the Beast* appeared this summer, Jack Abbott was, for all intents and purposes, free. (See "Barred Soul," by Jack Beatty, *TNR*, August 1 & 8.) His new admirers had written to parole authorities, attesting to his talent and to his ability to earn a living as a writer; Abbott had received a parole date of August 26 and had been granted a conditional release in the meantime. He arrived in New York—and was met at the airport by Mailer—on June 5.

Living quietly on the Lower East Side, doing research on hieroglyphics for Mailer's new book, Abbott also found time to visit the museums, where he discovered a penchant for Rembrandt, and to be feted by

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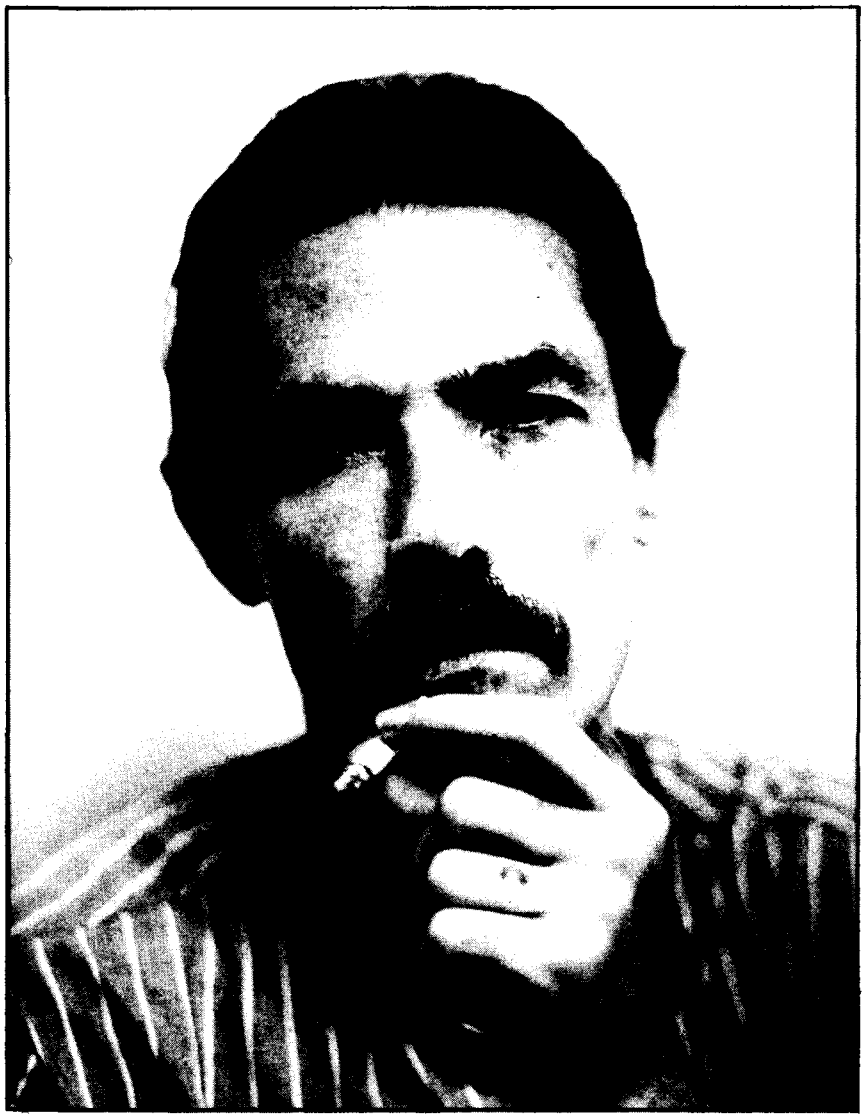
the literary society whose newest acolyte he had become. He was also privileged to experience an author's sweetest satisfaction: a chorus of critical acclaim for his book.

Sue M. Halpern, writing in the *Nation* under the heading "Notes from our Gulag," called Abbott "a stunning writer and a tenacious thinker" and went on to warn that "to congratulate Abbott for the triumph of his native literary talent and leave it at that is [no more than] a comfortable way to alleviate our complicity in the torture of men, women and children in American prisons."

James Boatwright, in the Washington Post, described Abbott as "a man living out a nightmare life . . . who not only survives oppression and worse but through strength of mind and will comes to understand his life and make something worth having from it."

In the *Village Voice*, Abbott was compared by Barry Jacobs to "the back-of-the-class bad boy who'll spit the teacher venom-for-venom because he believes he's right [and who] readily admits to murdering other inmates . . . raping them . . . to survive as a sensitive human being in the system we've created."



PHOTOGRAPH OF JACK ABBOTT BY THEO WESTENBERGER—GAMMA/LIAISON

Terrence Des Pres, in the *New York Times Book Review*, marveled that "out of nowhere comes an exceptional man with an exceptional literary gift." Des Pres, somewhat worried that Abbott's "prose is most penetrating, most knife-like when anger is its occasion," reassured himself with the reminder that "in his quieter moments melody and peaceful metaphor arise, and that is a very good sign." In any case, Des Pres concluded, Abbott's anger "need not be a problem. There is much to be angry about." Indeed, Des Pres insisted that "we must be grateful to [Mailer] for . . . helping to get Abbott out on parole," presumably so that he could put his anger to good use. This particular review reached the newsstands the evening of the day Richard Adan ended his 22 years on earth.

The book that occasioned these outpourings of admiration—and helped Jack Henry Abbott to freedom—is a selection from the letters he wrote to Mailer during their four-year correspondence. The excerpts, arranged with no apparent regard to chronology, are grouped according to subject, under chapter headings such as "Varieties of Punishment" and "Gods and Drugs."

And there is hardly a subject with which Jack Abbott does not consider himself equipped to deal. "The intelligence quotient," he decrees, for example, "is itself a way of mathematically judging the degree of fixity . . . of the self-evident axioms of mathematics. . . . It means that the most passive and obsequious . . . people in our society will score the highest."

"When the matador," Abbott proclaims, "brings the bull to its highest grandeur, the animal becomes ideally *ennobled*, and in a moment of truth . . . the matador pierces its heart."

"Stendhal," the author opines, "in [*The Red and the Black*], has succeeded in portraying people in personal relationships who completely misunderstood one another and yet continue together."

"The Shah of Iran," unlike American authorities, he decides, "will chop off your hands, but he will not (because he *cannot*) take your soul from you."

Jack Abbott as philosopher, literary critic, political analyst, in fact, resembles nothing so much as a precocious child regurgitating—with a dash of self-conscious panache—the tired old clichés he has learned will charm his elders. That this should be so seems not

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altogether surprising, considering Abbott's lack of experience in the real world.

It was, in any case, primarily Abbott's view of the world he knows firsthand that made his reputation. And his discourses on prison life are certainly clearer and more direct—though on closer examination hardly more convincing—than his thoughts on the shah of Iran.

"In San Quentin—and in many other prisons," he claims, "if a guard . . . sees you *touch* another prisoner, he *will* shoot you down with his rifle. If he sees you *run* in the exercise yard, he *will* shoot you down. In the process, 'stray' bullets *always* strike down other prisoners."

PRISON guards, Abbott insists, "are *extremely* venal. Extremely devoid of any trace of spirituality. Their dullness approaches the mentally defective." And their home life, according to Abbott, is "a study in domination of women and children. Their women and children do not *love* them; they worship them."

It is, in Abbott's considered opinion, the state that makes these guards what they are: "It gives them *arbitrary* power over prisoners. They embrace it *as a way of life*. That is the source of their evil." And Jack Henry Abbott, by his own account, has suffered from that evil more than most. "I've been subjected," he recounts, "to strip-cells, blackout cells, been chained to the floor and wall; I've lived through the beatings, of course; *every* drug science has invented to 'modify' my behavior —I have endured." His record, he informs us, "has in it more violence reported by guards than that of any of the 25,000 federal prisoners behind bars today, and I am not guilty of nine-tenths of the charges." Abbott has, by his mere existence, so enraged his keepers that "they've even *armed* psychopaths and put them in punishment cells with me to kill me."

Apparently it was Abbott's moral and intellectual superiority to his venal captors that enabled him to survive their tortures. He is, after all, a man who can say of himself that "there are not many books of philosophical importance I have not read"; who, in one five-year period, "read all but a very few of the world's classics, from prehistoric times up to this day."

Curiously, the very qualities that inured Abbott to the nightmare of prison also contributed to his difficulties. "I was," he says, "sent to prison for the same reason Caryl Chessman was executed: arrogance. . . . The judge sentenced me to the main penitentiary for the express purpose of having me raped by prisoners and reduced to a homosexual."

Whether or not this judicial strategy was effective—and this Abbott never makes explicitly clear—there is no doubt that the prisoner's spirit was never broken. "A round peg," as he puts it, "will not fit into a square slot. I don't think they'll ever let me out of prison so long as my release depends upon my 'good adjustment to prison.' "

Abbott's sojourn in the belly of the beast was made infinitely more unbearable by the fact that not only the guards but also his fellow inmates failed to measure up to his high standards of humanity; for example, "the loud fool in his infinite ignorance [who says] 'Gimme a cigarette, man!' And I just look into his sleazy eyes and want to kill his ass." Abbott's disdain for his brother prisoners was such that "when I'm forced by circumstance to be in a crowd of prisoners, it's all I can do to refrain from attack."

At a time when hardly a month goes by without some special "investigative" media report on prison conditions in America, when prison "uprisings" are commonplace, and when class-action suits on behalf of prison inmates are not unheard of, Jack Abbott's lurid tales of indiscriminate punishment and wanton killing might have warranted a second thought or two. (Where *do* they hide all the bodies in San Quentin when Mike Wallace comes to visit?)

Moreover, in the post-Freudian age, when the signs and symptoms of abnormal psychology are as familiar as the names of the calendar months, Abbott's ravings about his own treatment in jail might have been expected to sound a warning bell.

Instead, Abbott's grisly depiction of prison life was regarded as gospel truth, his grandiose and paranoid self-portrait accepted as evidence of a noble soul, and his expressions of violent impulses interpreted as "rage" against "society."

INDEED, that rage was undoubtedly the secret of Abbott's success. For his insistence that he bears no responsibility for his own actions, that he is no more than a creature of "the state," and that freedom, equality, and justice in America are mere shams might be said to express perfectly—on a personal level—the ideology dear to the hearts of New York's fashionable intelligentsia. Though they dismissed Abbott's outspoken and old-fashioned communism (he denounces Alexander Solzhenitsyn, for example, as a "militarist" who betrayed his country to the Germans) as the product of isolation and inexperience, Abbott's admirers accepted without question the underlying political message that capitalist America is a sick and evil society. It is, moreover, safe to say that had his attack on America come from the other direction, had his heroes been Hitler and Mussolini rather than Lenin and Stalin, Abbott's letters would have languished forever among the crank mail on Norman Mailer's desk.

If Jack Abbott was lucky in his choice of ideas, time was also on his side. Appearing on the scene at a moment when the jaundiced view of American society had become so chic as to have lost most of its radical vigor, Abbott must have seemed to hold the promise of renewal. Who, after all, should be more sensitive to the appeal of violence than Robert Silvers, whose maga-

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zine, during the heady days when revolution was just around the corner, printed instructions for the preparation of a Molotov cocktail on its cover? And who could be more aware than the crowd that gave us radical chic in the first place of the inspiration to be drawn from an insider's view of the ugliness of our society, from the perspective of a man who had passed his life in the very belly of the beast and who flaunted his own beastliness as but the reflection of his environment?

WHILE HOSTILITY to American society may have a stimulating effect on these aging radical salivary glands, however, it is hardly likely to be considered a *sine qua non* for parole. Whatever considerations influenced the authorities in Abbott's case—and releasing him certainly will be neither their first nor their last mistake—letters from Mailer, Silvers, McDonald, and Scott Meredith unquestionably loomed large in the decision to free him. But Abbott's sponsors, presumably taking a leaf from his own book, are now seeking diligently to absolve themselves of any responsibility in the matter. *They*, they assure us, never presumed to judge the man's character; this they left to his jailers, who knew him best. Their letters in his behalf mentioned only his great literary promise and his employment prospects. They would, it seems, have us believe that the most they hoped for in writing to the parole board was to provide Abbott with an electric pencil-sharpener. In any case, it is clear that their efforts bore fruit that they now find unappetizing.

Notably absent from this chorus of *non mea culpa* has been the voice of Norman Mailer. Since, however, he has never made a secret of his respect for violence; since he counts Abbott among "the proudest, the bravest, the most daring, the most enterprising, and the most undefeated of the poor," who inevitably wind up in jail in America; since, in short, he decidedly does not regard the propensity to harm others as a measure of unfitness to live in the free world, it should come as no great surprise that Mailer seems unrepentant about his role in the Abbott affair. His only comment on the subject has been that he finds the situation "tragic" for everyone concerned.

The family of Richard Adan would no doubt agree. But Jack Henry Abbott, for his part, has attained his goal: he walks among us, a free man. For that we are, indeed, to echo Terrence Des Pres, indebted to Norman Mailer and his friends, who may yet someday find themselves in the unaccustomed position of pondering the relation between acts and consequences.

Naomi Munson is a free-lance writer now living in New York City. Her articles have appeared in the Wall Street Journal, *Commentary*, and the *American Spectator*.

JAMES ATLAS

IT seemed like a good idea at the time. If Jack Abbott, who had spent all but nine and a half months of the last 25 years in prison, were released, Norman Mailer assured the Federal Parole Board, Mailer would sponsor him as a research assistant—"maybe putting my files in order." Never mind that Abbott had robbed a bank while a fugitive and once murdered another prisoner. Abbott was a *writer*, and thus enjoyed a special dispensation: not only did he belong to the literary priesthood, but he was the real thing; he did what Mailer only dreamed about—enacted the violent fantasies imagined in *Advertisements for Myself* and *An American Dream*.

Of course, Mailer's fascination with criminality is hardly without literary precedents. Since Rimbaud, the criminal has been a symbol of the conviction widely held among writers that they themselves are outcasts, enemies of society. Sartre celebrated Genet; Gide's Lafcadio pushed a man from a train just for the hell of it, the famous *acte gratuit*; Camus's stranger killed an Arab for no reason at all.

Nor is this conviction merely an idiosyncracy of the left. In the 1970s, William F. Buckley Jr., a law-and-order man if there ever was one, took up the cause of Edgar H. Smith Jr. (these juniors are a loyal clan), who had been convicted in the murder of a 15-year-old girl and had written a book on death row proclaiming his innocence. Buckley corresponded with the prisoner, promoted his work, and was instrumental in obtaining his release. Six years later, Smith was convicted of attempting to kill a woman in California, and during his trial admitted to having murdered the New Jersey girl after all. "You know, 20 years between crimes ain't bad," he said in his defense. (At least Smith was honest: "I hate it," he said of his literary vocation, "but it is a way to make money.")

Buckley was seeing matters differently by then. Having learned that his literary disciple would come up for parole again in 1983, he declared that Smith "must never be released from custody." "At the rate of one victim every 20 years," he noted, clearly haunted by a vision of being gunned down in a nursing home, "there would be time for a third; indeed, given a geriatric breakthrough, conceivably a fourth."

No one would claim that our system of justice is without egregious flaws, or that our prisons are even tolerable; the question is whether writers are the proper judges of who gets paroled. After all, their work is supposed to depend upon other traits: imaginative daring, the suspension of disbelief, even a certain amount of gullibility. Yet, for Mailer, it has always been the criminal who embodies these traits, who, by giving into impulses the more timid writer can only hope to enact in his work, is the true artist. For decades now he has been pushing the idea that violence is existential, hip, heroic. It would require a certain

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amount of "courage," he claimed in "The White Negro," for "two strong 18-year-old hoodlums to beat in the brains of a candy-store keeper," for it meant "daring the unknown." And in his introduction to *In the Belly of the Beast*, a selection of Jack Abbott's letters from prison published by Random House last June, Mailer insisted that "not only the worst are sent to prison, but the best—that is, the proudest, the bravest, the most daring, the most enterprising, and the most undefeated of the poor."

THIS attraction to criminality has provided Mailer with some good material. For all his curious theories, he remains our most resourceful and ambitious writer; more courageous even than his hypothetical hoodlums, he has returned from his strenuous field trips to the underworld with a good deal of authentic lore unavailable to more timorous natures. While Saul Bellow's Renaldo Cantabile, the tough-talking gangster of *Humboldt's Gift*, seems contrived, as if Bellow had never laid eyes on such a fellow, one feels that Mailer really has hung around with some of the pathological characters who populate his work. And nowhere is this genuine affinity more apparent than in *The Executioner's Song*, his greatest book since *The Naked and the Dead*. Mailer's portrait of the murderer Gary Gilmore is sympathetic and unsentimental; he neither condones nor romanticizes Gilmore's Gidean deeds.

Still, despite his energetic immersion in Gilmore's life and in the rather seedy clan around him, Mailer was on a literary rather than an existential errand in *The Executioner's Song*. He came on the scene as an observer after the fact, and never knew Gilmore; his experience of crime remained largely journalistic. Abbott, however, has brought him closer to the experience he finds embodied in the criminal—no doubt far closer than he would have wished. Only five weeks after he was granted the parole Mailer urged and sponsored, Abbott was being sought for questioning in the murder of a young, unarmed waiter who had refused to let him use the employees' washroom in a restaurant on the Lower East Side of New York. The waiter, Richard Adan, was a promising actor and dancer who had written a play scheduled for production by La Mama this fall.

Well, everybody makes mistakes, right? Less contrite than Buckley, who at least conceded that he had been "taken in," Mailer confines himself to the mild observation, "It's tragic all around." Of course, it is easier to see in retrospect what should have been apparent from the start. But was Abbott really a likely candidate for parole? One doctor after another, discovered M. A. Farber in the course of his investigation for the New York Times, characterized him as "extremely angry," "capable of sudden violence," "a potentially dangerous man" with "a hair-trigger temper." Captain Thomas Bona, director of the maximum security unit at Utah State Prison, considered him a "dangerous individual" and opposed his release. And suppose he *had* managed to curb his homicidal impulses; was the New York literary world, a world with a code of honor and revenge scarcely less forgiving than Abbott's draconian prison code, really the proper milieu for his rehabilitation? More worldly souls than Jack Abbott have found excuses for moral turpitude in events as benign as a National Book Awards cocktail party. "You can't really take a guy like Jack from behind bars and put him in the fast track in New York," said one public defender to whom Abbott had turned for advice. "There was bound to be an accident."

Besides, Mailer's plan for Abbott was pure fantasy. To assure the parole board that a man with a sixth-grade education—even one with the talent for physics that Mailer attributed to his disciple—could support himself is irresponsible. According to a recent Columbia University survey, the median writing income of book authors in this country is less than $5,000 a year. (On the other hand, Abbott's agent, Scott Meredith, predicted that his new client might earn as much as a quarter of a million dollars from the sale of movie and foreign book rights. Mailer may be a poor judge of character, but he has good business sense.)

The most revealing testimony, though, is Abbott's own. Even a cursory reading of his book ought to have alerted a less gullible employer to the volatility of his prospective research assistant. Drawn from the hundreds of letters Abbott wrote Mailer over the last three years, *In the Belly of the Beast* is undeniably a powerful work. Abbott conjures up with Dostoevskian intensity the horror of his existence, and his account of the punishments and deprivations he has undergone in maximum-security wards, in solitary confinement, in cells where he was tortured by sadistic guards, is utterly convincing. Confined to a black-out cell for three weeks, he raises a cup to his lips in the dark and feels a horde of insects run across his face: "I heard someone screaming far away and it was me. I fell against the wall, and as if it were a catapult was hurled across the cell to the opposite wall. Back and forth I reeled, from the door to the walls, screaming. Insane." Now that is strong stuff. And there is something poignant about this man's strenuous program of self-betterment, to hear him, armed with no more than a sixth-grade education and quick mind, remark that he

COMING

Marie Syrkin

On Zionism In Crisis.

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is reading *The Red and the Black* "again," and then offer an ingenious interpretation of the novel is enough, perhaps, to make anyone dash off a letter to the parole board.

For the most part, though, Abbott's book is a hectic screed full of shrill political jargon ("Communists *always* behave as anyone would expect real people in a real society to respond to one another"), vain boasts about his defiance ("My prison record has in it more violence reported by guards than that of any of the 25,000 federal prisoners behind bars today"), and spurious philosophy ("Existential faith for Sartre meant faith only in the distinction between one's ass and a hole in the ground"). Nor does it occur to Abbott that there may be some reason why he is in prison; he has a philosophical mind, he notes airily, and such a person "never comprehends the concept of guilt."

PHOTOGRAPH OF NORMAN MAILER BY MILTON H. GREENE

Still, there is this to be said for *In the Belly of the Beast*: it provides a candid self-assessment. He isn't "likable," Abbott warns Mailer early on; he endorses the code of manhood espoused by state-raised convicts, "dangerous killers who act alone and *without* emotion, who act with calculation and principles, to avenge themselves." "I consider it a weakness now to be loyal to any sentiment," he confides.

Abbott was more prescient than either Mailer or the Utah parole board about his chances on the outside. "By the time you get out," he claimed, "you are capable of *anything*, any crime at all." Indeed, there is some question whether he even *wanted* to get out. Freedom has become "a fading dream," he writes before there is any prospect of obtaining it. "I think I want out of prison the way the average man thinks he wants to be a millionaire, or to be, which is a better example, a great artist like Michelangelo. Not having the faintest notion of the sacrifices and effort that such things require in the average man." "I do not 'really' care whether or not I am ever released from prison," he confesses, and one believes him; it is a vague, unreal aspiration. And on the last page, when he learns that his release has been obtained, Abbott is more bewildered than jubilant: "I do not know how I feel at being given a parole." After all, he has been in prison or reform school since the age of 12.

The New York literary world, however, was gearing up for publication day. "We may yet have a new writer of the largest stature among us," claimed Mailer in his introduction. "I love Jack Abbott for surviving and for having learned to write as well as he does." There were dinner parties, an appearance on "Good Morning, America," an interview in *Rolling Stone*, and fawning reviews from critics. "His voice is like no other," declared Terrence Des Pres in the *New York Times Book Review*, "his language is sharp-edged and hurling with rage."

By the time that review appeared, Abbott was a fugitive again—though, like every other writer away in August, he was checking in with his agent, whom he authorized "in view of recent events" to transfer royalties to Abbott's sister. Here indeed is an "existential" predicament—or perhaps it is simply one of the unreckoned consequences of art.

James Atlas is an associate editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and author of *Delmore Schwartz: The Life of an American Poet* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). He is at work on a book about the perils of the literary vocation.

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STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Brand-new Re-runs

Where do they get the energy? I know that they are well paid, some of them extremely well, and a few of them get fortunes; but most of the latter already have fortunes, and, anyway, paid or not, rich or not, what happens to them in that sliver of morning consciousness when they realize they have to get up and do still another day's work on such a picture? How do they manage to put a leg out of bed?

The latest film to make me wonder about this is Sidney Lumet's *Prince of the City*. It runs two hours and 47 minutes. A good average of finished film, ready to print, is three minutes per day. That means 55 days of shooting time on *Prince*, plus many, many months of preproduction and postproduction work. A minimum of two years went into that picture by at least some people—all to produce the longest half-hour TV police drama on record.

Besides, Lumet had virtually made the film once before, when it was called *Serpico*. Once again he tells the story of a New York detective who cooperates with an investigating committee to root out police corruption. What apparently Lumet takes to be a substantive difference between the films—sufficient to go through all those immutable paces once again—is that Serpico was a crusader and this man, Dan Ciello (actually his name is Bob Leuci), was anguished, uncertain, torn. Ciello volunteered his services to the committee only after a couple of false starts, not out of a burning drive to purge the police but out of guilt for his own misdeeds, a desire to punish himself, and to "get back" on the right side.

It's a genuine difference, but it's just not, as shown, worth two hours and 47 minutes. How many times does Lumet plan to make this film just because he can find protagonists with different motivations?

Serpico was played by Al Pacino, an actor who can command fire, though in that role he didn't—very much. Ciello is played by Treat Williams, an actor who can command noise, and commands it here quite a lot. This is the noisiest film I've heard in a long time. Lumet whips scene after scene to vocal climax in transparent fear of the dullness of the many conferences, meetings, heart-to-hearts, and ruminations. Williams, besides the weight of mediocre ability, has the added disadvantage of a head that looks like a cube of wood topped by a wig, with features of expressiveness to match.

The script is by Lumet and the unfortunately ubiquitous Jay Presson Allen, from a book by Robert Daley. The theme is that police corruption is a part of police work. We know that trying to get rid of it completely is like trying to get rid of the odors of the human body. To live and function means to produce those odors. If you pay a man x dollars a year to protect the property of people with $20x$ dollars a year, to risk his life for the better-off, he is inevitably going to try to adjust the inequity—in a capitalist society, anyway. To put it another way, the police—whether we're accusing them of venality or brutality—are ourselves. And what else is new?

Lumet has a very capable new cinematographer in Andrzej Bartkowiak, who gives a stretch of loneliness to the emptiness of courthouse steps and can almost draw the ooze out of dark alleys. But with all the good cinematography and editing and some adequate performances in trite roles—excepting the popinjay Bob Balaban in a part supposed to have weight—it's just TV cop stuff, drawn-out and overbudgeted.

Reviewing *Serpico* (*TNR*, January 19, 1974), I said that there was nothing seriously wrong with it "except that it's unmemorable, not even terribly interesting while it's going on." And *Prince* is, in motion and shape, the second time around. To repeat: where do they get the energy?

Wolfen is basically just as trite, but at least one can see that the technicians got an immense amount of fun out of it. It's a supernatural horror picture set in New York; it deals with that first infirmity of ignoble minds, the forces of nature rebelling against technological intrusion. I don't mean ecological worries or civilization's discontents, but the mystic primitive forces that only American Indians, now working as construction workers, are privy to and warn the unheeding white man about.

A host of these forces, called collectively Wolfen, now haunts the devastated South Bronx (chillingly photographed by Gerry Fisher of Britain). These savage, unstoppable, invisible forces first murder a land developer because he broke ground for a new housing development in the midst of Bronx ruin, and these forces don't want their lair disturbed. In short, the primal forces are against urban renewal.

Michael Wadleigh directed and was co-author of the terrible script. His direction is good, as is the photography, as are some wonderful electronic images, done from Wolfen's point of view, the editing, and the score. I can see why *these* people wanted to get out of bed in the morning: they had real challenges, both to skill and imagination, and they had the gifts to meet them. If you can go to *Wolfen* and see and hear it without bothering about the human beings in it, you can enjoy what these technicians did.

Heavy weather is being made about Albert Finney's "return" to the screen. Well, he's in the film, unquestionably—as one of those star detectives who come and go as they please. I think—I'm not sure—that he attempted a New York accent. He didn't attempt much else.

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The Great Muppet Caper. Well, maybe it's *not* great, but it's the Muppets, capering.

Heart to Heart. A tender but far from saccharine film about three Parisian sisters learning love. Anne Caudry is enchanting.

Numero Deux. Jean-Luc Godard making aesthetic disturbances again, verbally somewhat tiresome, visually often illuminating.

Stevie. Glenda Jackson, as the poet Stevie Smith, and Mona Washbourne, as her adored aunt, help to make this small English film a small gem with a gem's inner light.

SK

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Waistline Note. Many detectives in films and TV shows are obese; what I don't understand is why any of them are not, Treat Williams and Albert Finney included. The baked goods they consume! Finney starts in *Wolfen* by munching a sugared doughnut—"to settle my stomach," he says—and chews on chocolate chip cookies as he watches a dissection in the morgue. The pies and sandwiches and cakes that these film and TV sleuths consume are a constant caloric counterpoint. Why don't they all waddle?

Box-Office News. The July 29 issue of *Variety* has some fascinating buried facts. Every week the magazine runs a full-page chart of the 50 top-grossing films of the previous week, as reported by about 2,100 theaters around the country. The ranking is by weekly receipts, but this is not the most interesting column. What's revealing is the "Average per Screen" column—the week's receipts divided by the number of theaters in which the film was showing that week. For instance, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is top of the July 29 list, with receipts that week of $2,866,489; it was showing in 173 theaters, which means an average of $16,569 per screen.

No surprise there. But No. 27 on the list was *Stevie*! First of all, that's not a negligible fact in itself. Its receipts for the week were $42,700, but it was showing in only one theater, so its average, obviously, was the same figure. Still, it is not juggling to point out that the per-screen receipts of *Stevie* that week were more than twice as much as the per-screen receipts of *Raiders*.

I note also that Fassbinder's new film, *Lili Marleen*—which I thought a disaster but is by a serious filmmaker—ranked No. 32, with receipts at its one theater of $20,000, above the *Raiders* average.

I wouldn't project that if *Stevie*, or *Lili Marleen*, were shown in 173 theaters, its average would remain anywhere near where it is. Nevertheless the *Stevie* receipts (in particular) argue that a minority-film audience—at least in some parts of the US—will break the doors down for a picture that speaks to it.

I'm sure that many of those who went to *Stevie* that week have also seen *Raiders* and possibly enjoyed it. The point—and oh, dear film industry, it's an important point—is that at least some of the *Raiders* audience want something quite different as well. And, if the distribution is intelligent, they can make it profitable.

THE LIAR ON THE COUCH

Richard Nixon: The Shaping of His Character by Fawn Brodie

(Norton; $18.95)

Frank Nixon, the 36th president's father, died in 1956, a few days after the Republican convention. His son, safely restored to the ticket by General Eisenhower, heard a certain Reverend George Jenkins give the funeral sermon. Jenkins singled out Frank Nixon's achievement in teaching his son that "honesty and charity are the great virtues, and lying and deceit the great sins."

Richard Nixon quickly went back to his campaign. He flew first to Buffalo, New York, where he began his speech with the words, "My father. . . ." Then, as Mrs. Brodie tells it, he paused, gripping the podium, as if to control his emotions. As if mastering himself he went on. "I remember my father telling me a long time ago," he began. "'Dick, Dick,' he said, 'Buffalo is a beautiful town.' It may have been his *favorite* town!" From Buffalo, Nixon flew to Rochester, where he began his speech in exactly the same way, changing only the name of the city. And from Rochester he flew to Ithaca, and said the same thing there. One reporter happened to be present on all three occasions, and recorded an exquisite triad of performances for posterity.

Much of the incessant lying which became a habit with Richard Nixon, and which eventually brought him to disaster, was of this political kind: relatively venial, according to the prevailing ethical canons, because it was at least rational and motivated by some sort of self-interest. It was reprehensible, no doubt, but all part of the tricks of the trade, like a salesman's fudging his expense account, or a butcher putting his thumb on the scales.

However, one of the great surprises of her research, Fawn Brodie writes, was the extraordinary number of unmotivated, unnecessary lies that Nixon told. She offers a connoisseur's choice. For example, who among us can forget that he said of his wife in the Checkers speech: "Pat's not a quitter; her name was Patricia Ryan and she was born on St. Patrick's Day." Who among us knew that she was christened Thelma, and only took the name Pat after her father died; or that she was born on the 16th, not the 17th, of March?

More substantial is the tale of Nixon and Sam Goldwyn. During the 1972 campaign the president, anxious to recruit support in Hollywood, visited and bestowed some sort of award on the ancient mogul, who was then ill and unable to speak above a whisper. Nixon made a cloying speech about the utter purity of Goldwyn's movies, their exceptional wholesomeness. The old man, who thus far had appeared almost comatose, showed growing signs of interest. He perked up, tugged at Nixon's coat, and finally whispered something to him in a voice that could be heard only by Nixon himself and by his son, Samuel Goldwyn Jr., who was present.

What the old man actually said was: "You'll have to do better than that if you want to carry California!" Nixon stopped abruptly, cut the ceremony short, and hurried out. The younger Goldwyn, greatly embarrassed, went with him. As they reached the door, Nixon asked in a whisper: "Did you hear what your father said?" Goldwyn junior thought it would be more tactful to pretend he had not heard. Nixon relaxed and confided. "He said, 'I want you to go out and beat those bastards!'"

Brodie demonstrates and documents how Nixon used small lies, all his life,

COMING

Mark Crispin Miller On Making A TV Commercial

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for pleasure or to make himself appear a more interesting person. He also used lying coldly as a political technique from the days when he snowed Jerry Voorhis and Helen Gahagan Douglas under what Brodie calls "a blizzard of lies" until his last day in the White House.

One could go further, I would maintain, and say that what was worse was Nixon's repeated use of the strategic lie. Thus his whole rise in politics owed everything to the skill with which he disseminated the essentially untrue idea that domestic communism was a dangerous threat to US society. And he made lying the guiding principle of two victorious presidential campaigns and two administrations. The campaign of 1968 was a double lie. Domestically, its slogan was "bring us together," while Nixon did everything he could think of to emphasize and profit from division. Abroad, he promised an end to the war, while secretly determined to win by enlarging it. In 1972, he maximized the margin of victory—he certainly would have won anyway—by falsely identifying his opponents with dope and desertion, dissidence and dependence. Meanwhile in foreign affairs he inflated the more genial but equally ludicrous myth that by initiating ties with China he had sidestepped the hard choices posed in framing a policy toward the Soviet Union.

But Mrs. Brodie has written not so much a political biography as a biography of the private man that draws much of its clinical material from his public life, as a biographer would indeed have to do in the case of an individual who gave so much of himself to politics, and so little to his private life. Lying is only one of the themes she has stressed in her study of Richard Nixon's character. The warping and withering of the capacity to love; the corresponding evidence of self-loathing; violence and the delight in punishment; the impact of death and what Brodie sees as the significant recurrence of what she calls "fratricide": these are the other themes. Brodie's is a dark picture, drawn with intelligence and with neither stridency nor malice.

Brodie began her biography shortly after Nixon's fall, and before the dogged attempts at rehabilitation—the memoirs, the Frost interviews, *The Real War*—and the swing of the political pendulum had begun to take hold. So it may be useful as well as illuminating. No one who has read this book, with its patient accumulation of detail, will find it easy to contemplate the retouched oil painting of Nixon the Statesman without either nausea or hilarity.

Still, it is a book that leaves me with real doubts, even qualms. Brodie's interpretation is generically but unmistakably Freudian. It attributes the tragic flaws in Nixon's personality to his parents. She quotes with approval the old Republican pro Bryce Harlow: "He was badly, badly hurt as a child. . . . Richard Nixon went up the walls of life with his claws." Brodie blames the parents most of all. "Hannah Nixon," his mother, was "a saint, not an angel," Brodie judges, and "had a peculiar constriction of the spirit. . . . Her quietly eviscerating 'little talks' had a lasting damaging effect." Brodie stresses the ill-effects of "abandonments," including the time Hannah Nixon went off to nurse her son Harold, who was mortally ill with tuberculosis. Even more Brodie blames "the shouting, belittling voice of the father, scapegoating his sons for his own failures, demanding instant obedience and proclaiming the message that fear rules in the world and not love."

THESE are not altogether implausible guesses when we are looking for what went wrong in Richard Nixon's life, and for the causes of that cold, manipulating, lying character. Indeed they are the most obvious guesses. Yet the analysis is also somehow a bit too pat. Not everyone whose parents were unemployed in the Depression, for example, or even everyone whose parents were killed in the Holocaust, is driven to bomb Hanoi into the stone age; nor does everyone whose father shouts at him, or whose mother decides she must go away to look after a desperately ill brother, suffer irremediable character damage as a result.

Then there is the question of the purpose of this kind of analysis. Psychoanalysis, after all, was developed as a tool of therapy. It was meant to help the patient. To understand all, the founders of the school of therapy assumed, was to forgive all. In historical biography, surely, we are in danger of having the insights of psychotherapy used as a tool for character destruction, certainly for libel, potentially for revenge. Why, with the greatest possible respect for her work, should we take it on Mrs. Brodie's word that her motives for pulling Nixon's character to pieces are purer than his motives when he destroyed the political reputations of Helen Douglas or Alger Hiss?

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What, finally, are we to do with such psychoanalytic insight into political figures? Are we to introduce a form of scrutiny for presidential candidates to make certain that none who were shouted at by their fathers shall be entrusted with the powers of nuclear annihilation? Must all presidential candidates have mothers who were angels, as well as saints? "Use every man after his desert," wrote a shrewd analyst of human wickedness, "and who should scape whipping?" Use every man after his parents' deserts, and where would the justice be in that? Richard Nixon, like the rest of us, is the creator of his own character, and best wishes to him as he contemplates that responsibility.

THE deficiencies of this lay Freudian or psychohistory fashion of writing biography are sharpest where Mrs. Brodie develops the theme of fratricide. The theme amounts to little more than three isolated facts. Richard Nixon did lose two brothers in childhood. He may or may not have felt guilty about that, and it may or may not have been unhealthy if he did. He certainly did to some degree owe his election as president to the successive deaths of John and Robert Kennedy. But they were each other's brothers, not his. And it is also true, though of doubtful significance, that from time to time Nixon was in contact with people, such as Whitaker Chambers, who also lost a brother in childhood. It is not much of a theme at best, and even then it is begging too many questions to label it with the emotional word fratricide.

Brodie introduces a much more penetrating insight, it seems to me, almost as an afterthought in the closing pages of her book. She rightly dismisses those who have said that Nixon has "no sense of place." His character was shaped, she points out, in Quaker Whittier, California, not just any all-American suburb, if there is such a thing, but "a small walled town resisting the enemy with its bastions of decorum." That citadel was threatened, mortally as it turned out, by the discovery of oil during the very years when he was growing up there; it was also threatened by the temptations to sin offered by the encircling Chicano society with its taverns and dance-halls, and by the "mad, wild world of Hollywood," which loomed like a guiding star for those who grew up in southern California in his generation.

This is an illuminating idea, it seems to me. I would have liked to learn more of Nixon's apparent ambivalence toward the Latin world. Brodie shows that his relationship with the Latin Bebe Rebozo was both older and deeper than generally has been understood. It has been, perhaps, the closest friendship of his adult life, and, with its long silences, the only true respite from the harshness of life. Intriguingly, Brodie mentions that Nixon thought seriously about emigrating to Cuba after he made a mess of his first case upon leaving law school. Perhaps that explains his ferocious response to those who took a paradise away from him. Surely it is one of history's most savory might-have-beens.

In general, it is more rewarding to look at the cultural and political influences at work on a political character than at the emotional deprivations of an individual childhood. Transferred to political biography, the Freudian approach, which rightly concentrates on the individual in the context of therapy, misses the crucial fact that similar deprivations in thousands of other families will always produce thousands of other liars, regiments of manipulators, brigades of potential executioners, just as they have done in virtually every human society. Nixon found no shortage of liars to work for him in the White House.

This is a fine biography. What Brodie does, she has done honestly and well. It is perhaps unfair to ask of any book that it should have been something other than it is. Yet Brodie has explained why Nixon lied—not why he was so hungrily believed.

Fawn Brodie died with her biographical project unfinished, in the sense that she felt that the presidential years could not be properly assessed without access to the tapes—800 of them—now being transcribed at the National Archives. She deals only with the first 50 years of her subject's life, up to the assassination of John Kennedy, though she reaches forward and borrows countless illustrations from the later years. Nixon's lawyers are trying to prevent the National Archives tapes from being made available to scholars. Until they are, Brodie writes, we shall not know whether there was, as we were invited to believe, a responsible statesman in the White House, along with the "shabby, pathetic felon" we know from the tapes that have been made public.

It will be left to other scholars to answer that question, and to undertake what may be an even more important study: not of individual character, but of a whole political culture. Such a study will seek to explain why so many Americans in Richard Nixon's time could be so easily deflected from their own real beliefs and interests by the spurious paranoid crusades of one variety and another which he had to offer; why, in short, a great and civilized nation, at the height of its power and prosperity, should have been so comprehensively taken in.

GODFREY HODGSON

Godfrey Hodgson is the author of *All Things to All Men: The False Promise of the Modern American Presidency* (Simon & Schuster).

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THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS, 1981

New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down
by Daniel Yankelovich
(Random House; $15.95)

We are all aware that real changes have occurred since the 1960s in the habits of Americans at home, at work, and at play. Most of us know this through direct experience, but are still capable of being surprised by their magnitude as revealed by the statistical record. The birth rate fell from 3.7 births per woman in the 1950s to 1.7 today, below the replacement level required to maintain a zero rate of population growth. Now only 15 percent, as opposed to 70 percent in the 1950s, of all American households consist of an employed husband, a housewife, and their underage children, the typical family unit pictured for so long beaming vacuously out of so many advertisements. Just over half of all women are in the labor market, including 40 percent of those with young children. The majority of families earning over $25,000 a year now depend on the earned incomes of both husband and wife.

I take these figures from the preface to *New Rules*. Fuller and better statistical data are available elsewhere, but these suffice to indicate great changes in the everyday expectations and activities of many Americans. Whether they amount to a "cultural revolution" or to the "world turned upside down" of Yankelovich's subtitle may be arguable. Yankelovich is not a demographer or an economic statistician but the director of an opinion-polling organization who has a background in psychology. He is primarily interested in the social norms and attitudes that presumably underlie the changes in behavior.

In the longest and most substantial section of his book, Yankelovich reports on the shifts in American attitudes toward various social issues that major polling agencies have found to have occurred since earlier surveys taken between the 1930s and the end of the 1960s. Some of the changes of opinion—on such matters as premarital sex, abortion, living together without marriage, extramarital affairs, interracial marriage, preferred number of children, equality between the sexes, the importance of hard work—don't seem all that remarkable, but all of them are in the direction of a more "permissive" outlook departing from traditional norms. Yankelovich divides the respondents into three groups: the 17 percent of the population upholding the "new rules" in their strong form, thereafter labeled "strong formers"; a majority of 63 percent who combine the new outlook with more conservative values; and a predominantly conservative and traditionalist 20 percent. He provides detailed biographical portraits, based on intensive interviews he himself conducted, of individuals and couples representative of each group and uses these as a point of reference throughout the book, although none of them is particularly vivid or arresting.

Yankelovich regards the "strong formers" as a cultural vanguard, fully committed to the new ethic of "self-fulfillment" that has supplanted, at least for them, the old "self-denial" ethic of the past. The fly in the ointment is that their "search for self-fulfillment" was nurtured by, and presupposes the steady and high rates of, economic growth interrupted in 1973 by the energy crisis with its attendant economic ills that have plagued us ever since. Yankelovich shrewdly notes that, although the self-fulfillment ethos has roots in the antimaterialistic student counterculture of the 1960s, in being diffused to a wider public it has easily blended with a taken-for-granted level of material comfort and relative affluence. Clearly, the strong formers must already be facing difficulties in paying for the travel, foreign foods, candle-lit dinners, artistic hobbies, water beds, outdoor sports, child support payments, and the like that, according to the surveys and interviews, are part of the self-fulfillment quest, especially since the questers are disposed to downgrade hard work at their occupations by comparison with their leisure and avocational activities.

Apart from some perceptive incidental observations, this book does not cut very deep in interpreting what it reports. The basic contrast between self-fulfillment and self-denial is itself open to question: one had not previously imagined that all those people buying tail-finned cars and ranch houses in the suburbs back in the 1950s were also wearing hair shirts. The notion that the 1950s was a period of self-denial echoes the prejudices of young people who, viewing that decade much as slightly older generations looked on the Victorian age, regard it as having been dominated by political and sexual repression that ended only with the unprecedented discovery of the joys of sex and the iniquity of the "Establishment" at some epochal moment in the 1960s. Yankelovich wonders at one point whether "success" and "self-fulfillment" may not actually be "interchangeable ideas" with only the object of striving having altered in recent years. He concludes that, although the distinction between them "may have been blurred in the past, . . . increasingly Americans are differentiating them"—all that bad-mouthing of money and occupational achievement by people who are not lacking in either. But this seems a slim reed on which to hang the claim that there has been a cultural transformation of earthquake proportion, a "shift in the giant plates of culture" in Yankelovich's own pet geological metaphor.

YANKELOVICH'S strong formers have much in common with David Riesman's "other-directed" character described in *The Lonely Crowd*, although the two authors differ in the traits they emphasize as the most salient. (Nor, despite the claims on the jacket copy, does Yankelovich's book belong in the same class with Riesman's justly famous study.) Both Yankelovich and Riesman suggest that the new men and women they identify exhibit a similar acquisitiveness and connoisseurship toward experiences, such as travel or sex, that in the past were directed toward material possessions. Riesman's book is almost invariably regarded as an analysis of American life in the 1950s—Yankelovich himself so refers to it on several occasions—but *The Lonely Crowd* was published in 1950 and drew on interviews and evidence from the late 1940s and even earlier. Riesman linked his new character type to a low birth rate and a period of "incipient population decline," as well as to a greatly reduced role for the family as the major agency socializing the child. His book appeared inopportunely just as the baby boom was getting fully underway, so he was constrained to drop the discussion of the demographic correlates of other-direction from later editions and to

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offer reformulations of his thesis in other writings. He had relied on the erroneous forecasts of professional demographers who utterly failed to foresee the postwar increase in fertility. Yet today the fall in the birth rate and the decline of the family have gone much further than in Riesman's mistaken anticipation of over 30 years ago. Yankelovich treats those declines as crucially implicated in the search for self-fulfillment that is both a partial cause and at the same time an effect of these trends.

THE self-denial ethic that Yankelovich sees as having lasted through the 1950s turns out to mean that the family, rather than the individual, was still seen as the recipient of the gains of economic growth; men continued to think of themselves as permanently married and working for the wife and kids, while women still aspired to marriage and motherhood. Riesman called sex "the last frontier" in *The Lonely Crowd*. That frontier was invaded and overrun with a vengeance in the 1960s and has been rather thoroughly colonized ever since. Yankelovich's strong formers ought to be able to ride out the current economic crunch with nothing to lose but their water beds. Lord Chesterfield memorably observed of sexual intercourse that "the expense is damnable," but contraception and the liberation of women have presumably changed all that.

In any case, the new sexual freedom and the nonmarriage and low fertility associated with it ensure that the strong formers will not remain a vanguard for very long. The conservative 20 percent of the population, barely mentioned by Yankelovich, are more plausible candidates for vanguard status, because with their deep commitment to the family and traditional sex roles they are likely to end up producing and socializing a larger proportion of the new generation. The Moral Majority, now only aspiring to that position, may yet become one and inherit the future. Yankelovich overlooks this possibility in his concentration on the self-fulfillment seekers and the partial adoption of their values by much of the rest of the population.

It remains no more than a possibility, however. For all the probably overrated political clout of their leaders, there is something pathetic about the rank-and-file supporters of the Moral Majority, wishing to bring back a world that has vanished and fulminating against a direction in Western, not merely American, culture that began nearly a century ago. The changes in sexual norms and family life since the 1960s are likely to prove irreversible for the foreseeable future. And they really did amount to a breakthrough at the level of conduct; as anyone who grew up before that time and has raised children since cannot help but be aware. The phrase "sexual revolution" at least is not hyperbolic. The last bastions of puritanism indeed crumbled in the 1960s. Yet they had been hollowed out and riddled long before, as Christopher Lasch for one, for all his excesses of pessimism, seems to know far better than Yankelovich. Today the 1950s look more like an aberrant interlude, a brief period of economic security and progress after a drastic depression and world war permitting a final, often self-conscious acting out of traditional family-centered values, than like an established, quasi-natural order of things in the manner of truly stable, time-sanctified cultures.

Yankelovich is right to reject Lasch's apocalyptic rhetoric about "our dying culture of narcissism," but the upbeat note he chooses to strike is scarcely more convincing. He thinks that self-denial and self-fulfillment are being synthesized in a new higher "ethic of commitment." His evidence is that people, even the most ardent self-fulfillers, tell the pollers that they want more "community," that their present relationships are "superficial, transitory and ultimately unsatisfying," and that they "hunger for deeper social relationships." One sighs. If there is such a thing as a standard sociological explanation for just about any new social phenomenon, it is the "search for community." It was invoked to account for class solidarity in the 1930s, the appeal of totalitarian political ideologies in the 1940s, the baby boom and the mass migration to the suburbs in the 1950s, the discontents of "alienated" students in the 1960s, the proliferation of new religious cults in the 1970s, and here we go again in the 1980s. The search for lost community plays the same all-purpose explanatory role for American social scientists that the ever-impending collapse of capitalism plays for Marxists. Certainly community has been regularly inundated by dark tides of anomie and alienation in modern societies, just as capitalism is always experiencing some kind of crisis. But there isn't any good reason to think that the next decade, or even the one

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after, is going to witness a final resolution and transcendence.

Anyway, Yankelovich's own evidence shows that a majority of the population (63 percent) has *already* combined the new and the old moralities, so why should they now need to work out a new "ethic of commitment"? Maybe they have created an unstable compound rather than a true synthesis, but most people's lives in complex historical societies are exercises in *bricolage*. If you go out determinedly looking for "community," "deeper ties," or "expressive" as opposed to "instrumental" relationships, you risk substituting a life-style for a real life, to echo the Jane Fonda character in the movie *California Suite*. Yankelovich's data, to be sure, suggest that the same thing applies to the "search for self-fulfillment," which not so long ago was fashionably called the "quest for identity," and quite a bit earlier, and much less pretentiously, the "pursuit of happiness."

DENNIS H. WRONG

Dennis H. Wrong is the author of *Population and Society* (Random House), among other books, and an editor of *Dissent*.

FAIR PLAY VS. FAIR SHARES

Equality
by William Ryan
(Pantheon; $15.95)

Ten years ago a group of politically active social scientists, loosely associated with the journal *Social Policy*, began laying plans to turn back what they called the "New Assault on Equality." They had in mind the sustained criticism of Great Society programs then issuing from political neoconservatives like Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, on the one hand, and from biological inegalitarians like Arthur Jensen and Richard Herrnstein, on the other. The first salvo in this counterattack was a special issue of *Social Policy* published in the summer of 1972. This collection of egalitarian rejoinders closed with "A Call to Action." It was written by William Ryan.

The inegalitarians, Ryan admitted in that postscript, had jumped off to a fast start—it was time to play catch-up ball. From the vantage point of 1981, we can see that Ryan urged his team on in vain. His adversaries continued to widen their lead; with the Reagan victory, the game was over.

Another contest, however, was as quickly begun, this time a new assault on *in*equality. The old critics have seized the high ground and are doing their best to ignore or glancingly dismiss a shower of theoretical and practical challenges. This last year has seen the publication of Amy Gutmann's *Liberal Equality*, Bruce A. Ackerman's *Social Justice in the Liberal State*, Martin Carnoy's and Derek Shearer's *Economic Democracy*, Paul Blumberg's *Inequality in an Age of Decline*, Philip Green's *The Pursuit of Inequality*, and Michael Walzer's *Radical Principles*.

William Ryan's *Equality* has a special place in this literature. It is a last echo of the old struggle and part of the new beginning. It is neither a very good nor a very bad book but a very instructive one.

Ryan is hardly the first to demonstrate the disturbing degree of inequality that persists in our society, but he does this clearly and emphatically, with a ready store of memorable illustrations. He is particularly concerned not only with the minority of permanently poor but also with the "vulnerable majority—not poor now, but in jeopardy." This great mass of Americans, unprotected by property, stocks, job tenure, or guaranteed pensions, bobs along on the surface of economic insecurity, some barely afloat, some swimming confidently, all subject to a sudden cramp or an unexpected wave—an incapacitating illness, a divorce, a plant closing, a car accident or heart attack, an unforeseen firing—that sends them flailing miserably or sinks them for keeps. "In any given year one family out of six in that vulnerable majority will . . . go through a year of poverty. Over a five-year period nearly half of them will be poor for at least one year." Most will not find this a bracing experience. Many will find it a crushing one.

Despite Ryan's skill in illustrating the persistence of an inexcusable degree of inequality and despite his accessible manner in puncturing many of the assumptions of inegalitarian justifications, *Equality* is instructive in a way the author never intended and would be loathe to recognize. Reading it, we understand why the egalitarians of the 1970s, in their counterassault on neoconservatism, took such a drubbing.

The central argument of *Equality* is cast in terms of a conflict between what Ryan calls the Fair Play and the Fair Shares perspectives on equality. Fair Play is the meritocratic rendition of "equality of opportunity" and for Ryan nothing more than "a fraud, a simulation, and a counterfeit." "Fair Play is not a rule for achieving equality, but rather an excuse for inequality." Ryan's alternative, Fair Shares, is something more than "equality of result," at least as this notion is popularly associated with quotas or some other numerical calculation of fair distribution. Instead, Fair Shares emphasizes "not division, but aggregation, not separating resources into small portions for individuals, but holding and using resources in common," the way we do libraries, public schools, streets, sewers, and parks. All citizens, by right, have equal access to these resources, although whether they make equal use of that access (by studying hard, checking out library books, playing in the parks) is up to their individual tastes and talents. Fair Shares equality would treat as many of the necessities of life in this fashion, apparently even food and shelter; it would expand vastly programs of social insurance and steepen the progressive tax structure, though ratios of three or four to one in "discretionary income" would be acceptable.

RYAN only sketches the outlines of Fair Shares equality. His real interest is in contrasting the "belief systems" that underlie Fair Play and Fair Shares. These he describes in a series of oppositions: individual versus collective; different versus similar; internal versus external. In the Fair Play ideology, "rewards rest on *individual* merit; individuals *differ* in merit; merit is a complex of worthy *internal* characteristics." The Fair Shares perspective, by contrast, views human achievements "in collective rather than individual terms"; concentrates on "similarity more readily than difference" among individuals; and believes "that external events outweigh internal

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factors in determining what happens to people."

There are at least three serious weaknesses in this argument, one logical, one ideological, one practical. First, out of suspicion, often well founded, of his adversaries' practical politics, Ryan fails to attend carefully to the principles they advance. He repeatedly asserts that Fair Play proponents believe that the extraordinary differences in income, wealth, and power found in the United States are actually justified by the meritocratic principles Fair Players endorse.

> The Fair Play idea appears to condone and often to endorse conditions of inequality that are blatant . . . . The Fair Play concept of equality has shriveled to little more than the assertion that a few thousand individuals are fully licensed to gather and retain wealth at the cost of the wasteful, shameful, and fraudulent impoverishment of many millions.

Unfortunately, the case is not so simple. Most meritocrats hold that existing social structures embody meritocratic principles to some degree, but what unites them is the belief that these principles represent the American ideal. Their case does not collapse, therefore, when confronted with the gap between theory and the actual state of things. They can simply reply—and do—that Fair Play has been insufficiently established, and that schemes like Ryan's Fair Shares would only reverse the incomplete progress that has been made toward a society where individual merit is encouraged, recognized, and rewarded. In practice, Fair Play may often serve as rationalization for the status quo; it hasn't always, however, and it doesn't look that way on paper. Logically the Fair Play ideal can be seen to challenge as much as support the American status quo—which is precisely why it retains such general appeal.

To this logical flaw in his counterargument, Ryan adds an ideological one. He grants his opponents premises that are naturally congenial to the American mind while he insists that the Fair Shares outlook must rest on completely different premises about human behavior that are at best unfamiliar, at worst ominous. In other words, he leads from weakness.

Why this should be so is puzzling. When Ryan first introduces his alternative ways of viewing human behavior, he admits that both sets of terms are required for a full characterization. But an emphasis on the collective, the similar, and the external is essential, he insists, to the case for Fair Shares, and this emphasis becomes more and more exclusive as the book proceeds. Perhaps because the author's sensibility has so little in common with that of Skinnerian social engineering, he seems not to realize that the premises he emphasizes for Fair Shares are also those underlying a world beyond freedom and dignity, a world challenged only by the prizing of the individual, the different, and the internal—which he is willing to leave to the Fair Players.

Of course, Ryan could have made both cases—that the meritocratic vision neglects the collective, the similar, and the external in human life, *and* that it does not even truly nurture the individual, the different, and the internal. Far more than either today's gross inequality or the Fair Play ideal of life as a meritocratic contest, a regime of Fair Shares would be likely to encourage individual talents, respect differences, and foster the internal awareness that marks individual responsibility. But Ryan forswears any link with the values his adversaries have appropriated. He is pained to discover that his own earlier writings were often marred by an at-

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The Next America: The Decline and Rise of the United States
text by Michael Harrington
photographs by Bob Adelman

(Holt, Rinehart and Winston; $18.95, $10.95 paper)

Who else but Michael Harrington would think of Ernest Bloch, "a most heterodox Marxist . . . remarkably sensitive to the utopian impulse in the strangest places," while walking through Disney World? Harrington has been confronting American realities with the conceptual weapons of high European Marxism for years, but this juxtaposition is so comically singular that it might have been invented by our very own Marx. Ernest Bloch at Disney World: what is the Reagan era to a mind that can come up with that? "The very ubiquity of our social confusions . . . might be reason for hope—because eventually it might force us to look for more radical transformations rather than seek shelter in an impossible conservatism." Talk about finding the utopian impulse in strange places!

Harrington's staunch and moving capacity to hope testifies to the spiritual efficacy of "praxis," the Marxist term for the unity of theory and practice. As the national chair of one of our socialist parties, Harrington is an optimist by profession. Less cynically, we may say that a lifetime of rubbing shoulders with earnest people dedicated to good causes—from labor unionists to feminists, from antiwar activists to striking farm laborers—has made hope his common sense. That man is the subject, not the object, of history is the lesson of Harrington's life as a theorist/activist of movements for social change.

But if the life of fraternity has sustained Harrington's morale and given him purchase on social realities isolated intellectuals never see, it has also made him a poor student of our media-induced passivity. A world in which the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity must be unimaginable to a man of his experience, yet Yeats's lines offer a fair description of our present political predicament, with its demoralized liberals and its radical Republicans rabid to despoil the welfare state.

Still, it is not Harrington's vision that limits his relevance to our situation. It is the sad fact that his socialist

"WEST FELICIANA, LOUISIANA, 1964" BY BOB ADELMAN

tachment to the Fair Play ideology. He calls R. H. Tawney's *Equality* "arguably the best book . . . on the subject"; yet even it "contains numerous manifest indications of the author's commitment to ideas like equality of opportunity . . . and individually differentiated merit." There can be no compromise: "We should not make the mistake of trying to disguise Fair Shares actions with any of the elements of Fair Play ideology on the grounds of making these actions more palatable or understandable." Ryan's rejection of ideological sleight of hand is admirable; but in this instance it is misplaced. A Fair Shares vision that appreciated elements of Fair Play ideology would be more palatable and understandable not because it was deceptively draped in popular banners but because it would be philosophically sounder.

Finally, Ryan's book is flawed in practical terms. With Tawney, he rejects the fallacy of "equality as long division." But having done that, he proceeds as though difficult problems of allocation no longer existed. He wants to expand continually the boundaries of the public and the "free." If free public libraries, then free public transportation. If free public education, then free public health care.

> If food stamps, why not fuel stamps? If food stamps for some, why not food stamps for all? If state liquor stores, why not state food stores? . . . If subsidized public colleges, why not subsidized public theaters, concerts, sports events? If children's allowances, why not homemaker's allowances?

But even commonly held "free" goods compete with one another for limited resources—schools against sewers, sewers against libraries. Even library books wear out, and when they are replaced someone must decide which to purchase—scholarly materials, literary classics, or popular novels. Public schools must divide their budgets among programs for the ordinary students, the unusually gifted, and the handicapped. All such decisions distinguish groups and affect them differently. Ryan implies that "soaking the rich" and substituting democratic decision-making for oligarchic control will suffice to solve these problems. They won't. He needn't have supplied a Fair Shares answer to such difficult questions in what is, after all, a short book. But his credibility would be strengthened by at least some indication that he had recognized and pondered the practical complexi-

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critique is not heard. Last winter, for example, Harrington's group of American socialists sponsored a conference on Eurosocialism. Big names attended: Mitterrand, Brandt, Palme, Benn. Yet the press virtually ignored the event, limiting its influence to a coterie. Democratic socialism remains a perspective, a point of view. It is still not a politics. Nor is Harrington's group a party; it is an "organizing committee," a sort of notes toward a party. Harrington says that socialists have to fight the formidable myths of American individualism, but their real foe is oblivion.

The Next America is a picture book. Bob Adelman's photographs are striking images of our recent social, political, and moral life. The accompanying text is divided into the two parts, decline and rise. In the first, Harrington surveys the collapse in traditional values that has animated the conservative revival. He discusses the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the long-term decline in religious observance, and the assault on political legitimacy mounted by such incongruous allies as Martin Luther King, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon. (Curiously, he leaves out inflation as one of the causes of our decline.) This section does not work very well as a unified argument. The pages on the changes in sexual mores, for example, hang in a conceptual void; one can't tell whether Harrington thinks the changes are signs of decadence or of increasing personal freedom; and one half-suspects that he devotes so much space to the topic to justify Adelman's voyeuristic photographs. (Even socialists have to sell their books.) Whenever he tackles political questions, however—such as the "tribal politics" introduced by the "all too visible hand of the welfare state"—he is trenchant, discerning, and original.

As for the rise of a next America, Harrington sees its outline in the radical potential of trade unionists; in the improvement in white-black relations signified by the sight of a white waitress serving a black man in a North Carolina restaurant as if it were a natural thing to do and not the result of recent state action; and in the palpable fact that the welfare state has worked for the elderly. On this point Harrington is eloquent:

> But let there be no mistake: it is better to be over sixty-five in America today than in 1934, before Social Security, or 1964, before Medicare. The major American reform program has worked, not failed, and there is no eternal, neoconservative law which says that all governmentally induced social change is bad.

Most of his evidence for a next America, "well to the left of the New Deal," is personal, open to debate. But in this "zero hour of a renascent conservatism," it is positively bracing to watch Harrington's dialectical imagination at work, discovering the seeds of the possible in the actual.

JACK BEATTY

ties of allocation.

Allocation difficulties are, of course, a favorite topic of the Fair Players, who believe that in some uneasy (and unexplained) relationship between market and merit they have found the solution. Ryan's indifference to this issue, like the other areas of weakness in *Equality*, suggests the general shortcoming of the egalitarian counterattack in the 1970s. The anger egalitarians felt, especially toward those they considered deserters from the camp of social reform, prevented a full appreciation of the strength of their critics' positions. Too often the egalitarian counterargument simply missed the mark, and proved unpersuasive to those who did not share its proponent's animus. By Ryan's account, that includes most Americans.

By now, it seems, the inegalitarians can get away with anything, and in an era when tracts such as William Simon's *Time for Truth* or Milton Friedman's *Free to Choose* or George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty* can ride the best-seller list, it may seem peevish to dwell on the shortcomings of Ryan's book. In intelligence and accuracy *Equality* is more than a match for what I have read of these other works; in intention and informing spirit it is their superior. But the inegalitarians hold the fort, and it will take more than equal firepower to dislodge them. *Equality* is okay, and okay is not good enough.

PETER STEINFELS

Peter Steinfels is executive editor of *Commonweal* and author of *The Neoconservatives* (Simon & Schuster).

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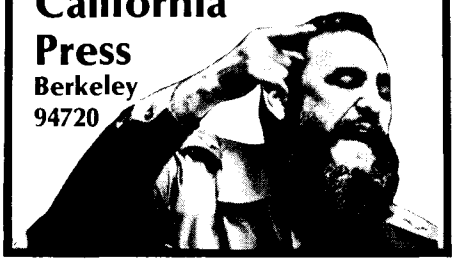

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'He Was Just A Slob'

The Ohio Gang: The World of Warren G. Harding by Charles L. Mee Jr.

(M. Evans & Co., Inc.; $14.95)

Warren G. Harding stood there behind his desk in the Oval Office, the most handsome president since George Washington, looking amiable and wearing plus fours for the game at the Chevy Chase club that would follow the press conference. Reporters asked him sharp questions, not because they really suspected anything but because that was their duty. They had turned him into a newspaper myth the minute he was nominated in Chicago—the inevitable American newspaper myth about the superman running for the White House. Now that he was in the White House the inevitable second part of the newspaper tale began, the emphasis on his difficulties and failings. For the moment his professions of faith in his cabinet were impressive. What about the charges of corruption in the sale of surplus army sheets and pajamas at the warehouse in Perryville by Veterans' Administrator Charles Forbes? "An abominable libel!" he exclaimed. The reporters kept up their yapping and a youngster in their ranks who had just rolled in from Boston in a Model T got a sympathetic first impression of this big, courageous, noble-looking man that lasted a lifetime. It was 60 years ago.

And what was happening just about this time a few blocks from the White House? Charles L. Mee Jr. lovingly has collected what amounts to an album of snapshots of the incredible period. Gaston Means is digging a hole in his downtown yard. He's a large, jolly, ingratiating man, six feet tall and 200 pounds, with a confidential twinkle that appeals to the gullible president. Harding has no idea what is going on. Means is a special employee of the Bureau of Investigation (later the FBI) and receives seven dollars a day. Not very much, come to think of it, to support a townhouse and a family. He also has three servants, a chauffeur, and a Cadillac. . . .

The hole he is digging at 903 16th Street is not a well, not a spot for a tree. It is a hole for buried loot. The yard has a fence like a steel cage with a double iron network on top going up 30 feet. The hole goes down 20 feet, ending in a terra-cotta pipe and a steel box. Means shares the facility with his bagman, Jess Smith—confidential shadow of ruthless Harry Daugherty, Harding's campaign manager in 1920 and now attorney general.

Gaston Means is a romancer who lies for the love of it. His clients are bootleggers, promoters, erring millionaires. At times he has as little as $50,000 in the treasure hole; at others, according to his strictly unreliable account, $500,000. Jess Smith would make a withdrawal and take some of the cash home to "the little house on H Street" that he shared with Daugherty. Daugherty survived the Senate Teapot Dome investigation and lived to write his autobiography, which explained nothing. Smith ultimately shot himself.

This new book on the Ohio Gang is evocative but tantalizing, heavy on vignettes but light on philosophy. Much of it sounds like a fairy tale; it's just too hard to believe. The story is the script of a Hollywood movie. What it leaves out is the American people and their peculiar system of government under which they can elect almost anybody president. Winston Churchill, by contrast, came up through Parliament for 50 years; American presidents are often inexperienced and sometimes "run against the government." In 1920 the voters were tired of war sacrifice and picked a nice-guy figure, the foil of conservative senators like Henry Cabot Lodge and the tool of political piranhas, the Ohio Gang, as rapacious a crew as the country had known since Ulysses S. Grant.

In Boston tourists can walk on the Freedom Trail, which tours a series of revolutionary shrines. I have often thought it would be helpful to Washington to have a "Harding Trail" as a reminder of the dangers of nondescript presidents. Begin with "the little house on H Street," the establishment set up by Daugherty and Jess Smith. The number, though Mr. Mee doesn't give it, was 1509. It was a clearing house and a convivial spot for poker. It received between 50 and 500 visitors a day—"Ohioans by the carload, men looking for appointments and paroles, pardons and opportunities." The chairman of the National Republican Party, Will Hayes, came there often; he was now conveniently postmaster general. Harry Sinclair, the oil man, was a frequent visitor. Daugherty presided. He was smart; he was never convicted of a crime. One eye was blue, the other brown. Besides that oddity he was seemingly type-cast as a tough, professional politician. In his term as attorney general he was privileged to approve 88 federal judges.

The house on H Street was famous for poker. It belonged to Ed McLean, owner of the *Washington Post* and the Hope Diamond. Charlie Forbes came by and Tom Miller, the alien property custodian. Warren Harding came in a limousine with "the Duchess" (five years his elder). She didn't play but Warren shed his coat, rolled his sleeves, cordially offered his plug around the table after first taking a chaw, and played to exhaustion, with long-odd stakes.

Next stop on the Harding Trail is "the little green house on K Street," number 1625, with a magnolia in the front yard. The Victorian greenstone townhouse has long since been swept away. The

Detail From The Altarpiece At Ghent

The angels
in the corner
crowd this postcard,
ready to fly
wherever the mails
might take them.

They have the scrubbed faces
and the gauzy hair
of my daughter's friends
in high school chorus,
their cupped mouths brimming
with hallelujahs.

Wrapped in the reds
and golds of cherubim
those rough girls too
dreamed about boys,
and when Van Eyck was done
grew up and married them

and died. Today I pin
their picture to my wall
where the bronze notes
of the sun's great harp
can strike them
back to song.

Linda Pastan

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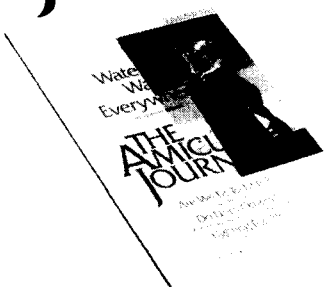

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janitor of the present office building is unaware of why it should have a bronze plaque on it. Liquor was delivered in this time of Prohibition, 20 cases at a time, in a Wells Fargo Company truck accompanied by a revenue man with badge and revolver.

We have taken you to the money well where some of the Ohio Gang kept cash, and to the two "little houses"; now it is time for a more intimate glimpse, across Lafayette Square, at the White House itself. In France there is a Festival of Light at Versailles and maybe there will be one at the White House some day too: one searchlight will poke its impertinent ray at a part of the executive mansion where a very tender rendezvous occurred. Twice a week Harding had his own poker parties at the White House and the Duchess presided, though she did not play. But this was a meeting from which she was excluded, with Tim Shade, the secret serviceman, guarding the corridor against her appearance. Nan Britton had been Harding's mistress since she was 20, and continued the liaison after he became president. She explained about it in her book, *The President's Daughter*. In a small anteroom coat closet about five feet square, she explains, they "shared kisses."

The sharpest comment about Harding was Alice Roosevelt Longworth's: there was nothing wrong with the man she observed, "he was just a slob." Poor chap; your heart goes out to him. He became aware of the betrayal toward the end; he knew his inadequacy. Why did America do this to him? He gave up liquor, he tried to rise above himself, he wept with friends. He released Eugene V. Debs, the saintly leader of US socialism, from prison; he assailed the 12-hour day in the steel mills.

After Harding's sudden death in San Francisco while returning from a trip to Alaska, the Teapot Dome scandal finally was exposed by a Senate committee. Interior Secretary Albert Fall was sentenced for taking a bribe in disposing of government oil. Charlie Forbes got jailed for conspiracy in selling off veterans' goods. Then, with Calvin Coolidge, the nation swept the Harding scandal under the bed.

The best biography of Harding remains Francis Russell's *The Shadow of Blooming Grove*. Mee's book is a fascinating reminder of an astonishing episode. The graft in 1921 was more innocent than under Nixon. Then they were merely grabbing money; in Watergate they were grabbing power. The moral in both is that America runs grave risks in its roulette game of selecting presidents.

RICHARD STROUT

Richard Strout, better known to *TNR* readers as TRB, is a Washington reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor*.

GOODNIGHT STALENE

How Can I Keep From Singing: Pete Seeger
by David King Dunaway
(McGraw Hill; $14.95)

It's odd to think that American folk music required a campaign of popularization among America's folk, but it did, and for a half-century Pete Seeger, in trouble and out, was the nation's indefatigable popularizer. To big-city concert halls and nightclubs, to college campuses and uncounted political rallies, he brought the songs he had picked up on his travels across your land and mine. Born in New York City from proper New England stock but fascinated with country life, he was just the fellow to interpret the works of authentic drifters like Woodie Guthrie and Leadbelly to an urban audience. Alone or in groups like the Almanacs and the Weavers, Seeger was the Johnny Appleseed of folk music.

David King Dunaway's engaging book is kind toward its subject without dissolving into reverence. Dunaway acknowledges the limitations, both musical and political, that went along with Seeger's dedication and courage. If this account is accurate, the dominant chord in the Seeger career was his father, a radically inclined musicologist, from whom young Pete inherited whole the mission that would guide his life.

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PETE SEEGER BY JACK COUGHLIN FOR *THE NEW REPUBLIC*

Seeger's causes read like a left-wing primer to 20th-century American history. He sang "Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People" on behalf of strikers and migrant workers; he sang for loyalist Spain, for antiwar groups ("Franklin D—You Ain't Gonna Send Me—Across the Sea") and then for pro-war groups; he sang for blacks in the South, for the opponents of nuclear weapons, and, finally, for a clean Hudson River. He was also a member of the Communist party, though that was not something he sang about. "It is a terrible thing to be accused of being a Communist," Seeger told a reporter in 1955. "You can never prove that it's not true and it follows you everywhere." Woody Guthrie also prevaricated, but was funnier about it: "I'm not a Communist, but I've been in the red all my life."

Despite a weakness for the euphemism "progressive," Dunaway is clear about Seeger's long and close association with the party and its offshoots. Beginning with the Popular Front period, when fascism was the Last Stage of Capitalism and communism was 20th-Century Americanism, Seeger sang to the party's drummer. He was mocked for it in folk tunes of the non-Communist left—"Well, they gave him his orders/Up at Party Headquarters." The only explanation from Seeger regarding his sudden change of tune after the German invasion of the USSR ("I wish I had a bushel/I wish I had a peck/I wish I had old Hitler/With a rope around his neck") is that he hadn't stood "on any false consistency." Again, he lacked Guthrie's gift of self-parody: "I started to sing a song/To the entire population/But I ain't a'doing a thing tonight/On account of this new situation."

Seeger never hammered the hammer of justice or rang the bell of freedom for his brothers and sisters in Hungary or Czechoslovakia or behind the Berlin Wall. As the Trotskyites sang of him, "He'd carry an umbrella if the weather was fair/'cause if it rained in Moscow, that's all he'd care." After Burl Ives had named names for the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Seeger wrote that Ives was "not quite intelligent enough to be honorable." Was it a want of intelligence, then, that prevented Seeger from making honorable noises about Stalin's dictatorship, even after the fact? The worst he could find to say was that it involved "an awful lot of rough stuff." He was tougher on Burl Ives than on Uncle Joe, whom he saw as "a hard driver."

The Aesopian lyrics of most of Seeger's songs allowed them to be picked up by banjo pickers without political proclivities and turned into hits by the likes of the Kingston Trio. With a few exceptions, such as "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," the lyrics were as all-purpose as a church sermon. What did it matter to the average sing-along that "If I Had a Hammer" was first performed at a benefit for indicted Communist party leaders or that "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" was inspired by Mikhail Sholokhov's "And Quiet Flows the Don"? Their message was in the ear of the auditor. (I never realized until informed by Dunaway that "If I Had a Hammer" was "an anti-cold-war mantra.") Not even the subversion-sniffers in Washington charged that anybody had been subverted by "Goodnight Irene." But, then, how could Seeger respond to the scornful dismissal by Lillian Hellman, a far more calculating progressive than he, of "We Shall Overcome": "You call that a revolutionary song? What kind of namby-pamby wishy-washy song is that?" Even in the revolutionary climate of Martha's Vineyard, however, it was hard to write a forthright ditty celebrating *Gulag*.

Seeger was never comfortable with the internecine bickerings so beloved on the left. (Dissatisfied with the make-up of the Weavers, the party sent forth its own folk song group, comprised, of course, of two whites and two blacks, two men and two women.) But he was much better than most of the bickerers in putting himself on the line. His radicalism was not fur-coat deep. Unlike Miss Hellman, he refused to take the Fifth Amendment at his hearing before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and was convicted of contempt of Congress, escaping jail by a technicality. And time and again, from tough picket lines, to the Paul Robeson concert in Peekskill that turned so ugly, to threatened black churches in the south, he took the stage knowing that vigilantes and cops were out there thirsting for Red blood.

He needed to sing and to strum; he

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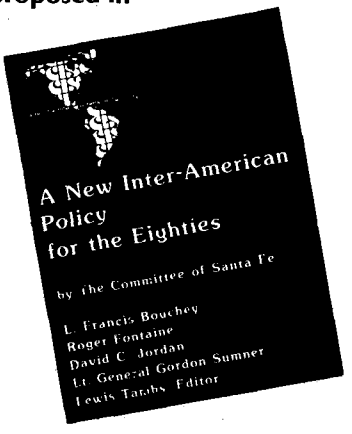
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needed the audiences who became The People while he performed for them. He also needed success—but when it came, it was a threat. Dunaway detects that in striving for bigger audiences—the people instead of The People—Seeger was inhibited by the price, the kinds of songs he would have to play, the kinds of listeners for whom he would have to perform, the show-biz types who would exploit his considerable talents. Although he switched from Folkways to Columbia records when he had the chance and was eager to get on television, his homelier-than-thou persona—workshirt, jeans, the down-home manner—was more than a pose. He lived frugally and quietly with his family in a cabin he built himself; he was straight-laced about women, alcohol, drugs; and he clung to his notions of the right kind of music just as he clung to his notions of the right kind of behavior. When Bob Dylan, no purist, got up in black leather and pounded away at an electric guitar at the Newport Jazz Festival, Seeger found the performance "disgusting." It was a betrayal.

The blacklist, which kept smothering his career just as it was about to take off, was a kind of salvation—thank you, J. Edgar Hoover, Harvey Matusow, *Red Channels*, and *Counterattack*. Seeger was a lot more comfortable on the subway circuit, strumming rousing favorites for the committed, than playing Reno or being just another act on a tour. How many lily-white clubs must a man swallow before he chucks it all up? How many Lucky Strike jingles must a man sing out before he busts his banjo? Although he was cheered at new left get-togethers, he was thoroughly old left, put off by the drug taking, the easy sex, the high decibel level.

How is it, then, that this fastidious, principled man who stood up to goons and ginks and company finks would not stand up to the party apparatchiks? Dunaway resorts to metaphor: "Seeger often preferred the complications of politics to vanish, leaving issues as sharply defined as a ship's mast against a clear sky, as uncompromised as a woodman's lair." Hence the attraction of Cuba and North Vietnam and the uncertainty about China. This book suggests that the party came to play the same sort of role that his father played in his childhood, offering a set of certitudes, none of which could be questioned lest all become questionable.

So Seeger moved from his father's embrace into the embrace of the party. The well-bred private-school boy from a sound old American family followed in dad's radical footsteps, dropped out of Harvard, put on overalls just like The People wore, and caught a ride on the party freight train. Jumping off would have taken a different kind of courage.

WALTER GOODMAN

Walter Goodman is the author of *The Committee* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) and director of humanities programming at WNET in New York.

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BOOZY LIVES

Oh!
by Mary Robison
(Knopf; $10.95)

Essential to the furnishing of Mary Robison's fiction is a well-stocked liquor cabinet and a crackling cascade of ice. In *Days*, Robison's 1979 collection of stories, her characters seemed to drift numbly through life with drinks glued to their palms—props as dear to their sense of style as the cigarettes so deftly employed by Salinger's Glass family. "Christine took a quart of vodka out of her bag and swigged from it," Robison writes in "Weekday," and other stories are wet with swigs, sips, emptying gulps. *Oh!*—Robison's confident first novel—is even more lethally saturated in alcohol, with the characters fishing cubes out of the ice bucket and freshening their drinks with all the desperate giddiness of passengers on a doomed ocean liner. Indeed, *Oh!* could easily be grouped with Kurt Vonnegut's later fiction and Barry Hannah's *Ray* to form a new subspecies of fiction that might be tagged the Bad Chemical

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novel. In the Bad Chemical novel, characters are not propelled by reason or belief or even desire but by whim, caprice—by whatever strange combination of booze, drugs, and hormonal hoochie-coochie happens to be percolating in their systems that day. The characters in a Bad Chemical novel have minds that resemble plastic bags filled with exotic fluids, a hallucinogenic bath in which no goldfish could survive. (When Hannah's Ray walks down the street, you can practically hear his head slosh.)

Set in a sweltering sprawl of the midwest plagued by tornadoes and low-buzzing helicopters, *Oh!* is a wiseacre comedy about a family of well-off misfits called the Clevelands. Mr. Cleveland, a widower with controlling interest in a corporation that has a wide range of interests (bottling plants, convenience stores, miniature-golf franchises), isn't reluctant to begin his day with a few stiff ones. "Earlier, in the morning, after his breakfast of screwdrivers and a sweet roll, Cleveland had met his gardener, Jack, who was already pissed to the gills." Everyone in the Cleveland household seems to swim idly through a pickled haze. Daughter Mo is a slumming, needling shrew whose happiest moments are spent napping in the sun ("'You sleep more than anyone I've every known,'" says the household's black maid, Lola); son Howdy is a would-be artist and actor who sips brandy out of glasses decorated with cartoon characters—Daffy Duck, Yosemite Sam. Even Mo's freckled daughter, Violet, is doped out at one point in the novel on ten milligrams of Librium. The only character in *Oh!* with her feet planted firmly in the sober world is Cleveland's mistress, Virginia, a born-again Christian who hosts a Sunday morning kiddie show and regards the excesses of the Cleveland clan with sniffing dismay. It's a losing battle prim Virginia is waging against the family's sarcasm and wooziness, and she knows it. She eventually packs up her indignation and leaves the Clevelands to their hell-bent ruin.

As a comic look at the muddle and disarray of modern life, *Oh!* is a far more accomplished novel than *Ray* or Tom McGuane's recent excursions into lurching funk. It's also a springing advance over the softly demure *Days*. Comprised mostly of stories first published in the *New Yorker*, *Days* too often displays the limitations of the *New Yorker*'s imprint: the stories are anecdotal

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and unassuming, meek little mice which peep their heads out into the daylight, then retreat into the sheltering dark. Whatever its shortcomings, *Oh!* doesn't suffer from a case of mousiness. It's a very lean, fleet, assured, sassing piece of work. Though the Clevelands are as awful a nest of reptiles as one would care to meet (they're about as appealing as the virgin-munching dragonettes in *Dragonslayer*), *Oh!* isn't an off-putting entertainment. As the Clevelands fiddle away on each other's nerves, the novel takes on the snappy rhythms of a radio comedy—a revamped version of *The Bickersons*.

> Lola fetched a robe for Cleveland. He put it on, moving gingerly as an invalid. 'You're just guilty about all the booze last night.'
>
> 'It isn't helping, Cleveland said. 'But I've had a warning from a medical man.'
>
> 'So has everyone over twelve,' Lola said.
>
> 'I'm dying.'
>
> 'You'd get better fast if you could see what I just saw. Your bride-to-be [Virginia] in her undies.'
>
> 'That doesn't matter now,' Cleveland said. 'I'm not interested.' His voice was soft and strained.
>
> 'Brand new drawers. Little tiny ones.'
>
> Cleveland grinned. 'She *is* something. Her throat's sort of old, but the rest of her could pass for thirty-five. Her knees are sort of old, too.'
>
> 'What's this?' Lola said, pushing fingers into Cleveland's waist. 'What's all this?'
>
> 'The sauce, Lola, is what it is.'
>
> 'And your hair looks lousy,' she said.
>
> 'It's thinning,' he admitted.
>
> 'You're lucky to get that woman, awful-looking thing like you.

Like Kingsley Amis in his early prime, Robison is capable of being both amusing and disagreeable—or, rather, she screws up the disagreeable to a piercing comic pitch, making the reader wince with laughter. She also shares Amis's chief flaw: she can be too pettish and lax with her talent, occasionally settling for easy effects. Lola, for example, is a more refined version of the character Amanda Rudolph played in TV's "Make Room for Daddy"—the spunky black maid who keeps her head while all the white folks around her ditheringly lose theirs. (Lola does have a weird spell or two, but she's still an anchor of sanity compared to the Clevelands.) That Robison's strengths and weaknesses are rooted in media culture isn't surprising. A hair or two over 30, Mary Robison is part of the generation that grew up with the TV humming in the living room, and her fiction reflects the influence of television on her characters' lives—in shaping their speech and wants and attitudes, in reducing their attention span to splinters. History, art, discipline, moral restraints all seem to have evaporated with the dew. Only the aquarium-blue light of the TV remains, and the sound of liquor purring over ice.

Except for a few stray reviews, *Oh!* has dropped almost soundlessly into the deep, which is odd considering the handsome acclaim *Days* received. Why hasn't the novel attracted more notice? Perhaps the book's goosing title left potential readers befuddled, or perhaps those fond of Robison's downy, evocative stories couldn't cotton to the abrasive nerviness of the novel. Whatever the reason, it's a large pity, for *Oh!* deserves a better fate than to lie discarded at the bottom of the well, surrounded by other novels, neglected and forgotten. Unlike a lot of current writers, who seem anxious to cuddle in the reader's lap and make nice, Mary Robison isn't afraid to light a few hotfoots, tweak a few noses. Seasoned a bit, Robison's flair for brittle talk and catastrophe could result in a comic novel one wouldn't be ashamed to place on the shelf next to the best of Evelyn Waugh. She, too, deals in slapstick declines and falls; in vile bodies.

JAMES WOLCOTT

James Wolcott contributes regularly to *Esquire* and the *New York Review of Books*.

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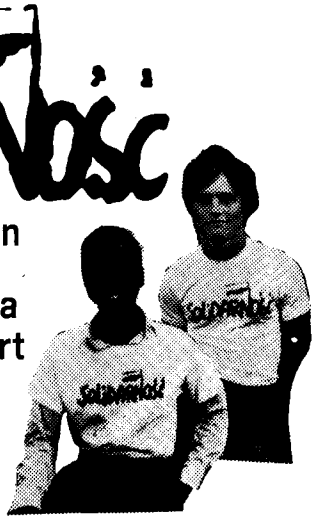

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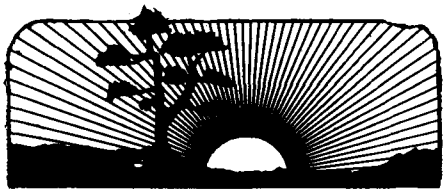

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Marked Men

EVEN THOUGH Secretary of the Interior James Watt believes the end of the world is near he moved last week to guarantee that the extinction of the humpback whale does not happen first. This has won Watt the favor of environmentalists, something he has not had before. Many of these same folk were pleasantly surprised to note that he'd also come down hard on the commercial water users of the Wetlands Water District in California, insisting that they at least pay the costs of what they use. This is something they don't want to do, and have taken Watt to court in order not to. The Environmental Defense Fund has entered the case on his behalf. In many other places, however, the fund is plaintiff against the secretary—in one instance representing 12 grizzlies whom his policies are alleged to endanger. I'm just back from a riding and rafting expedition in Wyoming, the fifth-largest state, with a population that barely entitles it to its single seat in the House of Representatives; and it wasn't until this trip that I fully understood the incredulity a Dutch journalist friend recently expressed at the common worry of liberals that the US is being used up. And he'd only traveled through the south Atlantic states. What would he think of this hysteria about the exhaustion of unspoiled America if he'd seen the empty vastness of Wyoming or Idaho or Montana or Arizona, or, for that matter, upstate New York? In six days and 60 miles of far and wide as the eye can wander we saw two backpackers, one herd of sheep, and one shepherd. No more than others do I want the physical patrimony of America despoiled. But there are difficult trade-offs between benefit and beauty, need and nature. Some of the more strenuous partisans of the pristine come from places like Los Angeles and Washington; and, indeed, it is nice to have huge stretches of the country preserved pure for the ten days every two or three years one likes to play Lewis and Clark. But this can mean hardship and restrictions on the locals. Watt has tried to address some grievances of these people. He is also and most controversially in favor of the exploitation of oil and minerals in selected wilderness areas. Rigs in the Badger National Park won't look pretty, but no one contemplates more than a few. Moreover, it may be that, as with other instances of abundance, we'd care more for our wilderness if we had less.

YOU MAY remember former Senator J. William Fulbright as the statesmanlike, rather haughty critic of the war in Vietnam; I remember him lamenting on television, after his defeat by Dale Bumpers, that blacks had been given the right to vote. Care to know his latest libel? In an article published in the Miami Herald and the Boston Globe, he pins responsibility for the threat of big power nuclear war on . . . you guessed it, the Israelis. They believe, he says, that US "detente with Russia is against the interest of Israel. . . . Their not insignificant influence in our government opposes our negotiating with the Soviets. . . . " Less grandiloquent folk than Fulbright have claimed that a settlement of "the Israeli conflict with the Palestinians" would solve only all of America's problems in the Middle East. But Fulbright believes such a settlement would also "open the way for the United States to resume the process of establishing more normal relations with the Soviets." How mighty the Jews are, and how malevolent! Why does Mr. Fulbright say such things? One reason is that, as Justice Department documents show, he has been a (well) paid, registered foreign agent for the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—a fact which neither newspaper publishing his article thought relevant for readers to know. Fulbright was quoted in the March 10, 1980, *Saudi Report* as saying that "Saudi Arabia is the most important country in the world to the United States." Take that, Mexico, Canada, Britain, France! Fulbright does work for his pay.

IT'S MORE THAN a year now that I've been remiss in not publicly welcoming my friend Mortimer Zuckerman to the publishing fraternity. When he acquired the *Atlantic Monthly*, the big newspapers treated it as a hopeful moment: the emergence of an energetic and imaginative steward for a magazine that had been in decline but still had creative opportunities as rich as its very rich tradition. But the hometown press, his and mine, by which I mean the Boston Globe, was churlish in its welcome, and not only once or twice in the months after the sale. Many Boston bluebloods and their emulators were stirred from torpor by the news, as they saw it, that this venerable literary institution had fallen to an upstart real estate fellow. It was not only I who thought that had the buyer's name been Cabot or Forbes, let's say, instead of Zuckerman, Beacon Hill crepe would not have been hung for the *Atlantic*'s genteel and infinitely boring former management. The George Apleys were concerned for the integrity of the *Atlantic*, they said, for its dignity, its honor. Well, the matter of honor is now in the courts. At issue is whether the sellers, in negotiating the deal, contrived a misleadingly rosy picture of the *Atlantic*'s finances. I've now been over the documents. Among them are four internal memos on different ways to doctor the books so that annual income would seem much larger than it was and expenses much less. One suggests tampering with the auditor's figures. Another instructs, "Read the Purchase and Sole Agreement and create a balance that conforms to that agreement." Or "The bottom line . . . is not going to look good under any situation: however, it must—this year, of all years—look as good as possible." And just how do you get employees to doctor books? "I don't need to remind you that what goes on that (bottom) line could make a difference to each of you of, perhaps, $50,000." The old management was not just dishonorable, it was stupid: these memos were left in the files. The Wall Street Journal and the New York Times business sections reported these discoveries quite fully; the Boston Globe did a once over lightly deep in the back pages, concentrating mostly on denials that embarrassing words mean what they say. I told Zuckerman a year ago that his best rebuttal to critics would be the magazine he and his editor (William Whitworth) put out. I have quarrels with them about using as many pre-publication excerpts from forthcoming books as they do. But, that aside, the *Atlantic*, under the new regime, is precisely what its predecessor was not: readable, handsome, challenging. That is Zuckerman's triumph.

M.P.

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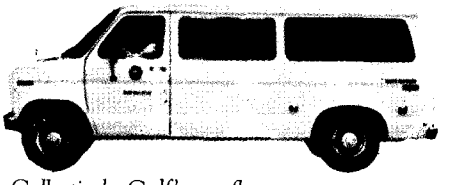

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